ゼロの使い魔 9

〈双月の舞踏会〉

ヤマグチノボル

MF文庫 J

Novel Illustrations

ヤマグチノボル（やまぐち・のぼる）
1972年2月、茨城県生まれ。
『カナリア ～この想いを歌にのせて～』（角川スニーカー文庫）でデビュー。著書に『グリーングリーン 緑ノ盲スタンディック』『つっぱれ！寿明川』『魔法戦隊ウのマレア　千日カゲロウ』（角川スニーカー文庫）『描きかけのラブレター』（富士見ミステリー文庫）『サンタ・クラリス・クライシス』（富士見ファンタジア文庫）『グリーングリーン 緑ノ盲スタンドバイ・ミー』（MF文庫J）など多数。『グリーングリーン』『Gonna Be!??』『ゆきうた』『私立アキバ学園』『魔界天使ジブリール』『そらうた』など、ゲームシナリオライターとしても活躍中。

◎兎塚エイジ（うさつか・えいじ）
大阪出身 大阪在住の大阪人。8月18日生まれ。
現在、サラリーマン兼ふたりのイラストを描かせて頂いてます。
今までの参加作品は『富士さきがいっしょ』（電撃文庫）
『ハンター都の百日千明はへ～』（GA文庫）です。

カバーイラスト／兎塚エイジ　装丁／bluе

ゼロの使い魔9
双月の舞踏会
ヤマグチノボル

MF文庫J
や-01-10

ISBN4-8401-1707-1
C0193 ¥580E
9784840117074
1920193005806

定価：本体580円（税別）
メディアファクトリー
MEDIA FACTORY

580

ゼロの使い魔9　双月の舞踏会

才人は使い魔として異世界に「召喚」されてしまった高校生。トリステインとアルビオンの戦いで、可愛い魔法使いのご主人様・ルイズと離ればなれになってしまったが、ようやく再会を果たした。前よりもお互いの距離が近くなったように感じ、ルイズは自分の気持ちに素直になりたいと思う。だが、才人を助けてくれた少女ティファニアやシエスタの存在が気になってぎくしゃくしてしまい、うまくいかない。そんなこんなで表面上は変化のない関係を保ちつつ、才人たちがトリステインに戻ると、今度は女王アンリエッタまでが才人を特別扱い!?　大混戦の恋模様の一方、見えざる敵はじわじわと動き始め……。異世界使い魔ファンタジー、第9弾！

MF文庫J ヤマグチノボルの本

グリーングリーン 緑ノ盲スタンド・バイ・ミー
【原作・脚本／GROOVER　イラスト／くろたまき】

ゼロの使い魔【イラスト／兎塚エイジ】
ゼロの使い魔2 風のアルビオン【イラスト／兎塚エイジ】
ゼロの使い魔3 始祖の祈祷書【イラスト／兎塚エイジ】
ゼロの使い魔4 契約の水精霊【イラスト／兎塚エイジ】
ゼロの使い魔5 トリスタニアの休日【イラスト／兎塚エイジ】
ゼロの使い魔6 精霊の炎赤石【イラスト／兎塚エイジ】
ゼロの使い魔7 銀の降臨祭【イラスト／兎塚エイジ】
ゼロの使い魔8 望郷の小夜曲【イラスト／兎塚エイジ】
ゼロの使い魔9 双月の舞踏会【イラスト／兎塚エイジ】

ゼロの使い魔 9

〈双月（ふたつき）の舞踏会〉

ヤマグチノボル

＊INDEX＊

＊第一章
ルイズの恐怖 …… 11

＊第二章
森の妖精 …… 37

＊第三章
担い手の出会いと別れ …… 61

＊第四章
シュヴァリエの称号 …… 86

＊第五章
水精霊騎士隊（オンディーヌ） …… 111

＊第六章
女王の想い …… 153

＊第七章
勧誘 …… 171

＊第八章
スレイプニィルの舞踏会 …… 188

＊第九章
怪鳥の対決 …… 217

エピローグ …… 246

サイト（平賀才人）
ルイズに使い魔として
「召喚」されてしまった高校生。
アルビオン軍との戦いで大怪我を負ってしまうが、
ティファニアの看病により一命をとりとめた。
アンリエッタ
トリステインのうら若き美貌の女王。
国の主ではあるが、中身はひとりのか弱い女性で、
もろいところがある。ルイズとは幼馴染み。
ルイズ
伝説の系統魔法「虚無」の使い手。
公爵家の三女というお嬢様で、
誇り高く意地っ張りだが、
使い魔である才人には強く惹かれている。
ティファニア
瀕死の怪我を負った才人を
助けてくれた少女。
気が弱く恥ずかしがり屋。
アルビオンの森の中で、
孤児の子供たちと暮らしている。
タバサ
二つ名は「雪風のタバサ」で、
本名も明かされていない謎めいた少女。
無口で本を愛する。
幼い外見だが魔法の力は強い。
シエスタ
トリステイン魔法学院で働くメイド。
才人に想いを寄せる清楚な少女だが、
恋するがゆえに強さと大胆さも併せ持つ。

ゼロの使い魔9
双月（ふたつき）の舞踏会

ヤマグチノボル

MF文庫
J

Chapter One: Louise's Fear

When Saito woke up, Louise was lying next to him, breathing softly.

Just yesterday he was able to see the pretty face of his master again.

Louise’s face under the morning light looked divinely beautiful, and that was somewhat arousing Saito.

They separated in January… and now after one month, Louise looked even more lovely. Louise moaned in her sleep and turned over in bed, and Saito felt stifled.

Her mouth opened slightly, and a thin trail of drool escaped from the corner of her lips.

Fuah fuah, her mouth slightly opened and closed from time to time.

Gulp. Her hand shot up and lightly rubbed the tip of her nose.

In short, she was a beautiful, spoiled girl.

Yet… such gestures carried all of her loveliness.

After the separation she looked even more lovely. Indeed… Saito felt admiration. This, this… was "separation" magic. Aye, even no-good gestures changed into charming ones – the ultimate magic.

Indeed…

The Louise last night must have also felt the effects of this "separation" magic!

But I… what did I do…

Saito blamed himself for last night.

Last night, was so intimate!

Louise's eyes were filled with such feeling!

That's why she said to me… "I want to have the same deep kiss too", and "I'm not angry when you touch my breasts"… it was a one-time miracle!

And yet, I missed my chance yesterday.

Saito decided to confirm if it was a dream, so he asked Louise "Is this really a chest?".

I am a dog.

I am a stupid dog.

A stupid mongrel…

Saito was suffering already, in the early morning.

No, Saito.

Can't call yourself even a 'dog'. Drooling this way over the cute Louise – you are a mole.

No…

Saito shook his head.

I am lower than a mole.

Look at Guiche's mole. He's cool. He dug a hole and saved us. Thus, I am lower than a mole… a mole cricket?

No, Saito shook his head again.

Mole-crickets are wonderful. Saito remembered reading in a book before: they… can fly, dig underground, and even swim. Ground or sea – they can conquer all.

I'm lower than a mole-cricket… lower than a bug… then…

I’m a water flea.

I saw it in the picture book, water fleas eat only various seaweeds.

That’s right… then I am a water flea… Saito thought he was suited for that name. Besides, he tactlessly blew his chance and wasted the special morning.

Getting depressed… Saito scolded himself.

What the heck are you saying?!

Saito should have more confidence!

I am a man who stopped an army of 70,000! And I cannot face a single girl? That’s unbelievable.

In this manner of encouraging himself, Saito gained some courage.

Since Louise just turned over in bed again, Saito put on a nice face and asked her…

“Are you awake?”

Then, Louise's body tensed and the upper half of her face peeped out of the blanket.

For some reason, her eyes were moist and cheeks were red.

Saito trembled.

…Is it the end?

“H-hey Louise.”

“…Whauahat?”

Louise asked while yawning widely.

Oh, Louise could make such a cute voice while not fully awake. Saito was impressed.

Now was the moment he had to show his courage.

“You… that, uhm… about me…”

Louise looked down biting her lip, wanting to ask something.

For Saito, the world seemed to stop.

Am I no longer needed?

Saito’s imagination was making Saito go mad in his head… Now determined, Louise started to squeeze out words.

The bitter words came out flying and hitting right into Saito‘s head.

“…Do you hate my breasts?” Louise asked.

Kaah, Saito sighed.

Oh, that’s what bothered Louise for a long time.

Saito last night asked her, "Is this really a chest?"…

…Aaah, aah, why did I say that!

“I-I don’t hate them!”

“Really?”

“Y-yeah…”

Louise then slightly rose up and sat straight in the bed.

Gripping the skirt of her shirt with both hands and with serious expression on her face, she asked Saito…

“The question changes then. Well then, which do you like more – big breasts or small?”

Saito began sweating profusely. To be honest, he liked big ones. It is not like small ones are horrible… but it was based on instincts.

It was a natural result of male biology. Big breasts suggest that the mother will have more milk to give. It would be filled with milk. Therefore, it can’t be helped. Thinking about future descendants, it was a basic instinct to choose a woman with big breasts… *so it is not like I am bad.*

Foolish quibbles turned inside his head…

Then Louise, looking at him with serious eyes, jumped into his vision.

Pinkish-blond hair and reddish brown eyes… beautifully shaped nose, coral colored lips… interweaving harmony. It was as if Louise’s loveliness was made by an artist.

Such beauty can suppress any instinct. This way, even small breasts become insignificant. No…

However, Louise would be obstinate even he said that. *It seems, I guess, she would not be consented. Clearly she wants to hear that he likes small breasts over big ones.*

But he liked big ones.

If he were to answer honestly, he would be taking all the negative responses from Louise on himself.

Then, should I lie – "I like small ones"?

But… Saito had no confidence that his lie would pass. Louise’s eyes were like a detective’s watching a criminal. A half-lie could not pass.

But, but…

Here, it was overlooking a man. A true man.

Saito's face cramped to the very limits as powers like the demons blotted up. However, Louise was merciless. She didn’t move a brow at Saito’s grimaces.

“Which ones do you like? Answer.”

Cold sweat was pouring down in waterfalls as he trembled.

Then the determination came.

Feeling like a president pushing a nuclear missile release button, Saito pushed the words out from the back of his throat.

“S-s-s-s-s-s-sss-small ones.”

“Really?”

Louise stared at him with eyes that screamed of blood-thirst.

I can’t be defeated here. Saito answered in a stiff voice.

“It’s true. Swear by Founder Brimir.”

With Founder Brimir involved, Saito yelled.

“I’ll kill you if it's a lie.”

The small, calm voice, expressed Louise's seriousness. Saito shook his head violently.

A long pause followed.

The atmosphere between was so stifling that it could have easily suffocated any bugs in the vicinity.

She gazed at Saito's face… and nodded as if convinced.

“All right. I believe you.”

The tension in the air slowly started to disappear.

Loosing the tension, Louise’s face switched back to cute.

Louise hesitantly started to trace circles with her finger on the blanket.

Such a shy Louise was so godly cute that Saito instantly felt uneasy. Then Louise hesitatingly shut her eyes.

But, she gripped her hands that she placed on her knees into fists and ‘Nnnn, nnnn!’ moaned angrily.

Though it was hard to understand, was she trying to say she wanted a kiss?

Saito was troubled.

For now, he’d just go with the flow.

Saito brought his lips close to Louise.

Though Louise’s body stiffened when he took a hold of her shoulders, she did not really resist. Louise's sweet aroma reached his nose… and Saito gladly dived into it.

Lips touched.

Louise, far from getting angry, gave her body in.

Aah.

Last night, when Louise said, "I want to have the same deep kiss too," she was not lying at all, and acted upon her words. It was in there already.

Such a passionate deep kiss was not just a part of a "reunion."

Then, the conclusion would be…

Hah, hah – she is falling in love as well…

Thought Saito while pressing his lips against Louise's, getting wild.

"Falling in love."

This magic's effect -

The girl with whom he was in love with, was falling herself.

The existence of such an event was unbelievable. This already was nearly like a legendary monster.

Suki-na-onnanoko-gajibunni-horeteru - the dragon with the long name. Aah, vigorously spouting a flame from it's mouth… the name of an ancient dragon that destroyed the pantheon.

Slowly, the couple separated their lips… and gazed at each other.

Shamefully, Louise averted her face.

"Stop staring so much… S-stupid. D-d-dog…"

"Forgive this dog."

"Stop apologizing. Dog… Stupid dog. This dog's habit, to look at it's master with such eyes…"

Louise pouted her lips, saying it in a voice that seemed to cry; Saito, before thinking what he was doing, unable to endure it any longer, jumped in and pushed Louise down.

"Kyaa!"

He started to kiss the scruff of her neck, sending shock waves through Louise's body.

“Sorry. I can’t take it anymore.”

While muttering ‘uwah‘ and ‘noyh‘, he pushed his hand through the gap of her shirt, Louise brushed his hand away.

“Louise…?”

Louise said in a tiny, tearful voice…

“Not when it’s bright,” She said.

From the outside of the window, the brilliant light of the sun streamed in.

Holding her shirt, Louise did not stir.

“When, when the night comes, all right...?”

Saito heard while trembling.

“A-a-after consulting with God and mother.”

Louise answered, trembling as well.

“How will you hear it?” Saito asked Louise in a stupid voice.

“In my mind! Mo! They can‘t tell me that! Don‘t you know! Stupid! Stupid idiot!”

She grabbed the pillow and started hitting Saito with it.

With these words, Saito, who understood, stopped asking anymore.

Only then did he notice the blood running from his nose.

After the couple dodged the tension by their promise for the night and went to the living room, there were Tiffania, Siesta, and Agnes.

“Good morning.”

Seeing Louise and Saito show up, Siesta smiled. Saito, not able to face that smile straight somehow, averted his face. Siesta had to strain for a moment to keep her smile on.

Tiffania was making rice for the morning.

Agnes was preparing her gun and sword.

Then… Agnes crossed her arms and asked the couple…

“Who were those enemies that attacked us last night?”

Saito and Louise looked at each other… then spoke to Agnes hesitatingly.

“Those were strange dolls.”

“Myoznitnrn… who has the ability to use any magical item…”

Louise answered honestly for the time being. Guess it was not important to keep this part a secret.

“Did you see its face?”

Louise and Saito shook their heads. It was dark, the opponent was hidden by a deep hood and was controlling the magic dolls ‘sleipnir’ indirectly. Since they didn’t have much contact with the controller, they could not see her well.

“What kind of element user is that person to control those dolls?”

Louise became silent. She hesitated for a moment if she should speak about her Void.

Seeing Louise acting like that, Agnes shook her head.

“…If it is connected with Miss Vallière’s element, then it would be problematic if I were to intervene. I am sorry.”

“…You know?”

“Well… not from Her Majesty directly. Mo, do not worry, I won’t tell anyone. I am not interested in spreading rumors in the palace, I am a mere soldier after all.”

Agnes said while polishing the sword.

“I wield my sword for Her Majesty. As long as you are Her Majesty's allies, I guess I wield a sword for you as well. What happened, who the enemy is, why such a thing is possible; I do not care to know.

After wiping the blade with a cloth, Agnes placed it back into it's sheath.

“Well, for two-to-three days we’ll be taking a rest. Are you tired?”

With these words, both Louise and Saito, blushed.

Anyway, even if they speak with Tiffania… they will take rest for today. There are also important things that cannot be spoken of… Saito nodded in his mind.

Behind Agnes, Siesta stood feeling nervous. Though tea was brought, the timing to place it was completely lost. Noticing the three glancing at her, Siesta shook her head.

“P-please do not worry - I have no idea what you are talking about! Yes!”

“Were you two able to sleep a lot last night?”

Agnes said out of the blue. A strange grin appeared on her lips. Siesta’s eyes narrowed.

Blushing furiously, Louise shouted.

“W-we were asleep the whole time!”

“I see. That’s nice to hear. Really.”

Agnes made a strange laugh. Siesta approached with a smile and harshly trampled on Saito's foot.

“Did you do it?”

“Do what?”

“I, I can’t say it out loud!”

“S-stop assuming things!”

However, finally tonight… they might. While thinking so, he could not look directly at Siesta.

“What are you saying? Mo, all of you, shut up!”

Grumbling, Louise began to walk awkwardly. It looked like her hands and legs were moving at the same time.

“Your hands and legs move at the same time,”

Siesta noted.

“What? For today it is okay.”

“I allowed you to sleep together for one day, because I haven’t thought you would start glossing over it.”

“That’s why you shouldn’t be saying such things in the first place!”

They both stared at each other, grinning angrily.

And, the moment when it looked like hell was going to break loose… Tiffania called everyone for a meal in a shy voice.

This voice broke the tension. Everyone was hungry.

After that, Saito and the others peacefully spent their time in the garden at Tiffania‘s house.

Saito cleaned the floor with a cloth.

There were no clouds interrupting the sky, high above the continent of Albion. Such fine weather soaked Saito with deep feelings.

Next to him sat Siesta, and she said looking at the sky…

“A beautiful sky… Somehow, it takes one’s mind away.”

Then with a serious look, she glanced back at Saito.

“Is it strange?”

“No…”

“Though we were attacked by a strange person… the war finally ended, and I was able to meet Saito–san too - I'm happy.”

Siesta gave him another smile. This smile made Saito feel uneasy.

Somehow, Saito felt guilty before Siesta. He remembered the talk a little while ago with Louise. But… *that’s love, I think.*

His heart throbbed because of that. That’s why… the words that can’t be mentioned came into his head so many times.

Maybe the feeling of something changing in Saito’s appearance… Siesta shook her head.

“It’s all right.”

“Eh?”

“I am second. That’s what you want to say, right?”

“Siesta…”

“I will wait.”

Saito became silent.

What he could not say out loud was understood already. He felt ashamed for a moment.

Pretending to be busy, Saito looked around.

Seemed like the others were not having too much of a peaceful time either.

Agnes was doing something absent-mindedly, distracting herself from her worries. Tiffania, who was sitting on a chair, was tightly grasping her fists. Louise was sitting, biting her fingernails and occasionally throwing irritated looks in their direction.

Suddenly, Siesta asked everyone…

“Hey everyone. What are your future plans?”

“Huh?”

Louise puckered up her brows to such a sudden topic change. Agnes turned. Tiffania trembled.

“Right. Everyone, let’s talk about the future. I think it is important. So…”

Agnes laughed.

“Aahaha! Future! Well, follow my career at my best… and buy a little land at my hometown. And, once I'm retired from the musketeers, living listening to the sea everyday.”

Next, Siesta said…

“A fantastic dream! I too…”

She looked at Saito.

“I think being able to live with a beloved person is happiness. It doesn’t matter where you live… Miss Vallière?”

Suddenly faced by such a question, Louise thought honestly, and blushed.

“…Now, please answer honestly.”

“W-what are you talking about!”

Saito thought absent-mindedly.

Future dreams.…

He hadn’t even imagined such a thing.

At first he thought about returning back to Earth.

Though it is still true…

“What is Saito-san’s dream?”

Siesta looked straight into Saito's face.

Dream…

He didn't think about it until now, the answer that in this world cannot be found… Saito looked up at the sky absent-mindedly.

The two moons were shining upon the forest… night came to Saxe-Gotha’s forest.

Trembling, Saito looked up at the night sky from the window in Tiffania's house.

Since the day he was born, he never was so impatient for the night to come.

Finally, Louise and I will unite.

Louise clearly had this in mind when she said in the morning, “When the night comes, all right...?”

After cleaning himself with water, Saito went to the bedroom.

When he slowly opened the door, he saw Louise, in the background of the moonlight, brushing her hair.

The hair that Louise brushed was sacredly bathed in the light, creating an

otherworldly sight. The light of the two moons emphasized the beauty of her hair. Saito was breathless.

Noticing Saito standing in the doorway and watching her… Louise muttered as if talking to herself.

“Is something wrong?”

“Nothing…”

Saito replied as he shook his head. As he was extremely nervous, he felt that his throat was very dry and he would like a drink.

When Saito approached, Louise started to tremble.

“Scared?”

When Saito asked this natural question, Louise shook her head.

“…I made a promise with the Princess back then.”

“Promise with the Princess?”

Seems like Henrietta and Louise promised each other something.

“It is so.”

Louise turned to Saito. There were traces of tears remaining on her cheeks.

“That… we would tell each other before it comes to this…”

“Louise…” muttered Saito, who came closer and sat next to her. Louise cast her eyes down and covered herself with the sheet.

“That… ne? Uhmm… ne?”

With the eyes of frightened kitten, Louise looked up at Saito.

“I broke my promise with the Princess…”

Unable to hold back, Saito embraced Louise.

“Louise! Louise!”

Louise laid down in the bed. Her chest, dressed in a white shirt as always, was moving up and down from the excitement and fright. Giving in, Louise closed her eyes and placed her hands up on her chest like praying.

“Louise, I… I!”

And the moment he let out his shout…

Knock *Knock* someone knocked on the door.

Saito and Louise quickly jumped up.

“W-who?”

They both asked at the same time.

“It’s me…”

Came a small voice. It was the master of the house, Tiffania’s voice.

Saito and Louise looked at each other. Saito, in his haste, jumped down to the floor.

And when Louise said, “Come in, please,” the door opened and a girl with flowing blond hair showed up. Though it was in the night, she still wore the large hat.

Flowing blond hair… the drifting atmosphere of a foreign country, a beautiful face, and a slim waist.

Louise knit her eyebrows.

Though she forgot because she was happy to meet Saito again… this Tiffania was an unexpectedly pretty girl.

She was dressed up in loose clothes wrapped around her. She had a tray with a jar of wine and a few cups.

“Umm… please take some. I thought you would have trouble falling asleep,

changing beds…”

It was natural for her to worry about them and bring wine.

“It’s all right. I don't care.”

Pretty girl…

Somehow a bad presentiment began to whirl in Louise's chest.

Louise carefully scrutinized Tiffania’s body. She had slender, delicate limbs… compared to Louise, she was tall too.

Besides, though she lived in the forest, she emanated an aura of the nobility. Just who was she?

Louise asked Saito in a low voice.

“This girl… feels suspicious. You know something?”

“Somewhat.”

“What somewhat?”

“…I’ll tell once Tiffania agrees.”

What, Louise thought.

A secret between two people? What? The uneasy feeling grew stronger.

Thus, the congenial atmosphere from a little while ago, changed rapidly into uneasiness.

Asking Tiffania, before talking to Louise – she didn’t like it one bit.

A master asking for permission. Shouldn’t I be the one that is asked for permission?

What on earth is this secret?

The doubts that were swirling in her head… were blown off somewhere because

of Tiffania's following behavior:

She, while trying to place down the wine, had entangled her feet with the cloth and fell down with a crash.

“Aatatatatata…”

“Are you all right?”

Louise jumped out of the bed panicking and ran up. Tiffania shamefully blushed.

“I-I’m all right! Sorry… didn’t meant to scare you…”

She muttered while picking up the cracked jar of wine.

Then…

Louise’s eyes landed on impossible magic items.

“…Eh?”

A short groan escaped her mouth. No, it must be an optical illusion. Louise rubbed her eyes and stared at the magic items again.

The valley down there was deep.

The word "big" utterly failed to describe the breasts that peeped through Tiffania’s loose clothing.

Louise breathed heavily while trembling.

She couldn’t even make a sound any more. One should say, such an exceedingly large dimension was mortifying. When a person sees an overwhelming existence, it is said that he or she is at a loss for words. This was what was happening to Louise right now. Just like when she met a Familiar of Void who introduced herself as Myoznitnirn, the impact was huge.

The world is wide. It exceeded Louise's imagination by far.

Louise turned to Saito.

However, Saito looked at Louise while smiling.

“…”

Though Louise stared doubtfully at Saito’s face, his expression didn’t change. Meanwhile Tiffania, with a short, "Have a good evening" said in a strained voice, went out of the room.

“Now did you see that?”

She asked him.

“N-now? Because I was watching only you, I do not understand what you mean.”

Saito said, looking spaced-out.

…Somehow it was not convincing. Louise slipped between the sheets again.

What was that…

The sight of the valley was burned into her eyes and was not leaving.

She pushed her finger under her shirt and looked at her own breasts.

She could not understand why. Nourishment, inheritance… Nothing could explain why it was so flat there.

But even if she knew… learning about the reality, she lost her confidence again.

I-I am cute…

She tried to persuade herself. After all, even after she showed her breasts, Saito didn’t choose Tiffania or the housemaid, right?

Even thinking this, all her feelings withered.

Not now, anyhow… Louise thought.

After confirming that, Louise dove back into bed and pulled the blanket over her head, Saito let out a relieved sigh.

He was glad.

He survived.

The moment when Tiffania entered… Saito had to cover his secrets.

Even Saito was not that stupid. Louise would figure it all out from the look in his eyes staring at Tiffania's ultimate weapons.

"Final secret 'eye' move – closing them…"

In the voice of a man who finished his hard work, Saito said quietly so that Louise would not hear him.

He slipped again next to Louise and tapped her shoulder.

"…Asleep?"

After seeing Tiffania, Louise was disheartened… and did not stick her head out from under the blanket.

The air of sweetness that spread all over the room, now completely disappeared somewhere… Feeling disappointed, Saito complained.

Chapter Two: The Elf of the Forest

The next morning…

Inside the forest near Saxe-Gotha, tearing a morning haze, a single girl showed up.

Her delicate body was wrapped up in a black mantle, her long pink hair as if it were falling free. With annoyed gestures she brushed a hair lock back, slightly damp from the forest's morning dew, as she continued to lean against a tree. The girl's cheeks were slightly pink, matching the color of her hair.

It was Louise.

Taking a deep breath, Louise squatted down next to the tree and hugged her knees. Then, she buried her pretty face into them and muttered silently.

"Uuuuuuuu, it's so embarrassing. What to do? You can't be embarrassed. It's too late to feel embarrassed now."

With a blush on her cheeks, after some rustling Louise took something out… It was… a part of a black cat costume that she made the other day. And then placed it on her head – a black cat's ears appeared on Louise's head.

Blushing furiously, Louise fixed the ears.

"It's embarrassing. But I cannot be defeated."

She recalled the conversation with Saito last night. And the uneasiness with which he did not want to talk about Tiffania…

Is it something… concerning her breasts hidden by her clothes?

Louise could die from an explosion from a single gunpowder barrel that huge…

What a secret. This…

She felt uneasy since last night when she found the connection. Anyway, Louise was bound for the time being, wanted to be Saito's best. *Do you want to be compared to others?* she thought, deciding that she didn't want that. It was her first time after all. She wanted to carefully choose the moment when her heart would be ready.

Nevertheless… after seeing such things, she could not stay calm.

So…

These are weapons that shake my pride…

Breasts.

Right, the frightening and brutal articles. Tiffania had two of them.

They were huge.

No, huge was not the problem.

It's that she herself didn't have those ultimate weapons equipped.

It's that after seeing those things, Saito, after kissing Louise, asked, "Is this really a chest?" Those were his first words.

Seeing such things, then seeing Louise's flat chest, it was not very hard to come to such a conclusion.

However, she was determined to not allow that.

"Even I won't be defeated."

She persuaded herself.

And, I want to prove it.

Louise felt it necessary to build up her self-confidence.

Then Louise stood up, raised a big bag to her chest and opened it. Once it was

open, she let out a deep breath. Louise breathed deeply for a short moment trying to calm herself down. Louise's flat chest was lifting up and down.

With an angry face, Louise stared at it.

“No one is here.“

Around here, only children, excluding Tiffania, lived in Westwood Village. She could see only a squirrel collecting nuts and a small bird.

“Well, do it.”

Silently muttering, Louise took off the Academy of Magic uniform. She took off her skirt too, and stood dressed only in underwear.

Louise took out an item from the bag to fulfill the, "make me confident" strategy.

“Though I took it without permission… I left my own clothes instead.”

Louise's trembling hand was grasping Siesta’s maid clothes. She stole them from the bedside of Siesta, who was sleeping in the living room. Since it didn’t consist of an apron, she took Tiffania’s that was placed on a chair.

“That idiot likes maids.”

Louise muttered, closing her eyes and trying to sort her thoughts out.

“But he also likes master. Maybe. Probably. That’s what he said. Maybe those are only words…”

Louise nodded – un un.

“I’ll add two. Surely with this I’ll be invincible. Well, cat-ears are a bonus.”

She said while fiddling with cat ears.

She wore them, rustling Siesta’s maid clothes.

“Uu…”

After noticing the spacey part for the breasts, Louise clenched her fists and let

out a sigh. Not only Tiffania had this brutal power, she remembered. Though not like Tiffania, Siesta was also comparatively wonderful.

“What's that! It’s too big! It’s ridiculous! That stupid maid! It’s not virtuous!”

Though Siesta was not looking for honor anyway, kick! kick! – Louise began kicking the tree. After kicking it for a while, she shook her head and looked down.

“No, not lost. No way Louise would lose like this. Ah, aah, aaah, you're not even really cute!”

She muttered many times, persuading herself.

“I'm cute. Very cute. I’m the cutest in the whole Halkeginia. Besides, I'm a user of Void. This means I can cast wonderful magic. Really great. Great. Therefore you can go without worries. That…”

Louise touched the emptiness of the maid clothes at the breasts part. Fully recognizing the difference in size, she began to kick the tree again.

“Whatever I eat! It doesn’t change at all! Neeeh!”

From the impact of the kicks, various insects started falling from the tree. Louise screamed.

“Noooooooooo!”

Her parents never saw Louise cry so hard. No one ever saw her so weak. Haah, haah Louise breathed wildly, shaking her head.

“What? Really, my Void can beat these baggy boobs easily!”

Then Louise crumpled her shirt into the chest space of the maid’s clothes. Seemed like Louise was really a Void. Void in a certain meaning. It was empty.

Though the bust looked somewhat distorted, Louise was satisfied and started to practice for the time when Saito would pass the tree.

This morning Louise slipped out of bed quietly, and left a letter for Saito under

the door. "Come to the forest" was written there.

She did not write where in the forest and who would be waiting.

Louise, with her noble pride, thought that he would understand it naturally. Though someone may doubt if not telling the place to Saito was a good idea, but as said, Louise wanted to prepare for it properly.

“Right, today I will say those important words. Sorry…”

Sorry? Louise glanced up at the tree.

“Thank you for always helping me. But though you always take care of me… I do not show much gratitude to you. Therefore I…”

Louise placed a finger under her chin.

“Therefore, a familiar shouldn’t be treated like that forever. Since you love me… and I, uhm, too sometimes dream of you… Don’t misunderstand. It is not a full love yet. How about it? Insufficient?”

With a blush on her cheeks Louise muttered.

“I like you more than a familiar. That feeling. You're higher. Therefore, I promote you to servant. Great isn’t it! You can be treated as human. Isn’t it wonderful? And to show that I'm genially grateful…”

Louise at her best tried to “make him fall for me completely.”

To make him fall in love was the so called "expression of gratitude" by Louise.

Louise with both her hands took the corners of her skirt, and lightly biting her lips, muttered…

“…I thought this is what you want. Well, for me, what you want is important. You said you love me. Therefore, please…”

Louise lifted the maid’s skirt and held the corner of it in her mouth, revealing, slender legs and white underwear under it.

And said in a soft voice,

“…be gentle.”

This was, Louise thought, a killer shot…

This tremendous legendary power exceeded Void’s spells.

She would die if Saito saw her like that. Such a spectacle.

For a while, Louise’s body froze in this position.

However, she had a second thought. Here in such a place, she wasn't a noble anymore. She stopped being one of the Duke’s family members in here. She lost her name when she stepped in here. Uuu, a nameless woman.

After thinking for a while, Louise pointed at her body with her finger.

“B-but, t-this, t-this is still not good. Really. Can’t stop it anymore.”

Then Louise's face blushed even more. She became ashamed. Then, as if not being able to endure it anymore and stopped it, Louise continued the one-man play.

“H-hey! W-where are you touching! I said stop already!”

Louise made a pushing away gesture with her hand.

“Hey! Stop! Are you listening? Dog! Stupid dog!”

And so the small birds and squirrels watched in amazement how Louise, who was sitting under the tree, continued brushing off Saito’s hands many, many, times.

Tiffania woke up after Louise, who had waken up early in the morning, on her bed in her room and stretched. Then her melons, that should have been under her night clothes, jumped out. Tiffania hid her melons with her arm while blushing.

Then she gave out a painful sigh.

“This is bad after all…”

Doubt concerning her own body had crept up since the day the guests arrived. Tiffania removed her arm and looked at her chest.

“Are they too big?”

After comparing her chest with the women that came looking for Saito, it was impossible to hide. Tiffania hadn’t seen many girls in their pubescence. Therefore she wasn't worried about her chest size.

But…

“Louise-san, Agnes-san, Siesta-san… even the biggest of them, Siesta-san, is half of my size.”

So, Agnes was half of that, and Louise was…

“Flat-topped.”

As Agnes would meanly say. *But, then my breasts are.*…

“Weird…”

Tiffania’s shoulders dropped.

I'm a failure, a half-breed after all, with this curse of distortion that fell on my breasts - Tiffania started to blame the origins of her birth. From common sense, it had no relation to being a half-breed, but because Tiffania lived mostly with children, she lacked common sense.

Though she felt like crying since the early morning, Tiffania shook her head.

“I won't show such a face in front of the guests. I'm not precisely entertaining… I already upset them last night by causing trouble while carrying the wine.”

Calming herself down, Tiffania began to think about the menu of today’s lunch.

“That’s right. We have some ripened peach-apples. I’ll make an apple-peach

pie.”

The peach-apples were easy to find in these places, the inside of the fruit was soft, just like a peach. The pies made with them were very delicious.

However, Saito and the others may be worried while seeing me gone. Those people seem to be targeted by a strange enemy…

Tiffania, who experienced considerable danger when young, wasn't afraid of such a turn of events. *I won’t be careless and let myself be attacked. And even if I were attacked, I can always use the "Forget" spell to save myself.*

For now, Tiffania decided to leave a note.

“I went to the forest to pick some fruit. I'll be back before noon.”

Upon waking up and noticing that Louise is not present at his side, Saito let out a sigh.

“Damn…”

He missed his chance yesterday.

Saito felt despair for a little while, looking forward to today reluctantly.

Life's long.

And the failure of two evenings is not a problem.

Saito thought.

For today he must speak with Louise about the important thing.

Tiffania. She, like Louise, is a Void user. Half-elf. Because of that, Tiffania should not be treated as an enemy elf, right? Yet…

Louise looked uneasy after seeing her true self…

However, it should change once she gets to know Tiffania better.

Thinking this way, Saito got up from the bed and went out of their room, and headed towards the living room for breakfast.

When he opened the door, something placed between the door fell down.

He picked it up – it seemed like it's a piece of paper.

“What the…”

It was a white parchment with black ink letters written on it. Though Saito could recognize Halkeginia’s written character, he still could not read, of course.

Saito faced the living room while inclining his head.

However, Louise was not around. There was no Tiffania either. There was Agnes who was talking about something with Derflinger while leaning against the table.

Saito slowly stuck out his head and called Derflinger.

“Yo, partner. Good morning.”

“Did you sleep well last night?” Agnes asked, with the same mysterious smile on her lips as yesterday.

“Couldn’t fall asleep.” he answered Agnes, who misunderstood the meaning; her grin widened. What do those adults imagine…

“No, it wasn’t because of THAT.”

He tried to clear the misunderstanding.

Agnes was dumbstruck.

“It’s the second day you slept in the same bed.”

This, said by a young woman, made Saito blush.

Derflinger thrust himself into their conversation.

“When it comes to this, he only has a hundredth of the courage he has in the battlefield.”

“Shut up!”

Saito stared at the intelligent sword. Derflinger started to shake. Seems like he was laughing. What an annoying sword, thought Saito and asked…

“Where’s Louise?’

“Wasn’t she with you?”

“Louise was not there when I woke up…”

“Haven’t seen the maid and Tiffania as well.”

“I s-see.”

If Siesta and Tiffania weren't around… Then, who wrote the letter? Saito asked Agnes.

“What’s written on here? I can't read…”

He hadn’t talked about coming from another world with Agnes. But because in this world literacy among commoners did not seem to be very high, Agnes received the letter without any sign of surprise.

“It reads - ‘Come to the forest.’ Nothing else added. Not even a name.”

“What, could it be an invitation to a date?”

Saito looked doubtful.

From whom?

Who on earth asked him to go to the forest?

At first it seemed like Louise would be the most obvious answer. But… Saito denied such possibility…

Why would Louise use a letter to call me somewhere?

If she had some business with him she would talk "directly".

Maybe Siesta?

Or Tiffania?

While he was wondering so, Agnes tapped his shoulder.

“Though we don’t know who… leave quickly. That someone might be waiting for you.”

“Fear embarrassing a woman.”

After being encouraged this way by Agnes and Derflinger, with a strained face, Saito nodded.

"Embarrassing a woman is terribly scary."

What Louise did to his body made him realize that very well.

Saito faced the forest.

Yet, it is easier said than done as he did not know which direction he should go to. After all, Westwood village was in the middle of the forest…

Come where… muttered Saito while following the footpath leading towards Saxe-Gotha’s plains.

The forest in the morning was refreshing. Through the branches of trees sunlight occasionally peeked through. While walking… Saito was called to a stop.

“Saito.”

When he turned around he saw Tiffania stepping out of the tree's shadows. She had a big basket with her. She wore the usual green dress.

Saito was startled.

Was Tiffania… the one that called me?

“Uhm… Was that Tiffa’s letter?”

“Yes.”

Tiffania nodded quickly.

W-what?

Tiffania said she called me to the forest.

What is the meaning of this?

“W-why to the forest…”

“Eh? I wanted to make something for you to enjoy. Uhm…”

Enjoy?

Enjoy in the middle of the forest? Enjoy, what the heck?! That!

Fantasies started to go round and round in Saito’s head. He didn’t try to stop them. One after another, various fantasies rose from his head.

“Could you tell me w-w-w-w-what do you mean by "enjoy"?”

Tiffania shyly turned her face away.

“I wanted you to eat some delicious fruit.”

Saito was petrified.

W-wh-what a metaphor.

Comparing her chest with fruit.

Moreover, for me to have fun with?

“W-what the… that p-person… really… this fellow, like that…" Saito wanted to cry.

“…D-delicious fruit?”

“P-peach-apples…”

In other words… sizable and soft like a peach, and round like an apple.

Such entertainment, made Saito’s nose bleed.

“A-are you all right?”

Tiffania ran up to Saito anxiously. With each step, Tiffania’s peach apples wrapped in green clothes bounced. Saito panicked. *No! Bad! Louise and I have a nice relationship right now! And now because of this…*

“I-it's wrooong! There is no need for such enjoyment! Not for me! Please!”

Boing

Saito’s hand, that he thrust out, landed on something.

I… Just now I…

…and the object that is on the other side of my palm.

What could it be?

It was soft and warm – truly, these were the fruits of heaven.

“God and Founder Brimir, could this be a peach apple…”

Like reaching the Arcadia Village at last, Saito felt pure bliss emanating from his palm.

Thoughtlessly, his hand clenched.

It was completely on instinct.

His hand stopped obeying his mind’s orders.

When he timidly opened his eyes, he saw Tiffania's face, dyed in an embarrassed red.

“Aiu.”

Tiffania looked on a verge of tears.

Saito pulled back.

“S-sorry! Very sorry! I didn’t mean it! Really!”

At that moment…

The sound of spell echoed from behind them.

"Eoh Thorn Feoh Járnsaxa"

When he turned around… he saw a girl, a Void user, holding a wand in her hand.

“Louise.”

Saito trembled.

From Louise’s mouth came the words of a Void spell. Saito could feel the almost visible aura of fury surrounding her. Tiffania became frightened.

"Ós Thorn Uruz Ru Rad"

“Louise, you are mistaken. This…”

Saito desperately tried to find an excuse.

And why was Louise in Siesta’s maid clothes with cat-ears on her head? More so, why was she in the forest?

No, it’s not the time to worry about Louise’s wardrobe. Because right then a spell was being chanted. The power of Void was proportional to the time it took to cast…

Hey, hey, are you seriously going to unleash such a powerful "explosion" on me?!

“Hyaa!” screamed Saito, escaping.

"Peordh Yr Sowilo Kaun Othila…"

Saito ran away into the forest. He dove between gaps of trees, elbowing his way through branches, trying to run away desperately as if encountering a bear.

However, despair took over Saito.

An angry Louise was much scarier than a bear.

He couldn't escape.

Before Saito could advance more than 20 meters, the despair was transmitted to his feet.

He heard the sounds of Louise violently elbowing her way through the bush from behind him. Though he tried to stand, he was too scared to stand straight. When he fell on his stomach and tried to crawl away, he saw feet before him.

He looked up.

“Siesta?”

She was wearing Louise’s tight white shirt. She had a basket in her hand.

“H-help…”

When he muttered, Siesta gave a ‘Hmmmm’.

“Help! Now! Terrible!”

Not listening to his pleas, Siesta started to talk.

“When I woke up this morning, my clothes were gone. This shirt was there instead.”

“Siesta! Please! I can’t stand straight anymore!”

“Moo, it was good nevertheless. Then I came here to gather edible wild plants to make a delicious soup for Saito-san. Then, when I heard Saito’s voice from the footpath, I became so happy thinking that he came here because of me.”

“There’s no time for that now! Louise! Louise!”

From the back, Louise’s angry footsteps grew louder.

“I was surprised. Then I saw Saito-san groping Tiffania’s chest.”

Siesta squatted down and looked into Saito’s face with a smile.

“You sure like to touch big ones♪”

“T-that was inevitable!”

Siesta jumped back from Saito and hid herself behind a tree.

Turning his head, he saw Louise with a set up wand. Her face was pale from anger.

“Stop!”

Louise watched her familiar trying to crawl away with a frightened expression on his face, and thought…

Why this idiot…

A-after all that trouble to meet again…

After all his m-m-master said.

For a moment, she thought to reward his loyalty with something more than a kiss.

She was even going to abandon brandishing noble’s authority.

More so… I changed my attitude.

I thought about trying to find a way to bring him back home after this.

And he said – ‘Is this really a chest?’

It’s all right. She always doubted about that herself. She had to look truth in the eyes.

But, anyways.

Whom and where do you think you are touching?

The maid's tongue. It's all right. She moved 100 steps ahead. 100 steps are not enough. She'll move 1000 steps. After all, after mustering the courage at yesterday evening to surpass Siesta… to have the same thing to gloss over.

But a chest asks for a capital punishment.

Groping those ridiculously big breasts. That's what mattered.

Ancient runes started to undulate within Louise.

Magic expanded within her body, splintering into tiny pieces and dissolved into her blood stream, and turned into a medium to further enhance her magical powers.

Louise lowered her wand, aiming it at Saito.

"Ah! Aah! Ah! It hurts! Uwaah…"

A huge explosion swallowed Saito's screams.

The thick cloud of dust dispersed… Saito, after Louise's "explosion" spell, was trembling on the ground.

"I-it hurts…"

Saito, who barely escaped death, groaned.

"Shut up. How was it? Was it big? You like big ones above all, don't you? Answer! Answer now!"

When she poked Saito with her foot, Tiffania's voice came from the back.

"An explosion… what?"

"What-what explosion! Didn't you see it yourself! And I thought you were nice!"

When Louise turned around, Tiffania stood there. Louise eyes went wide.

“You…”

Startled, Tiffania reached for her head. Because of the blast her hat fell.

“Elf?” Louise’s voice began to tremble.

Two people looked straight at each other.

“…Why is an elf in such a place?”

Chapter Three: The Meeting and Parting of The Users

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

Louise asked, in the living room of Tiffania's house as she looked down at Saito, who was lying sprawled on the floor, receiving Siesta’s treatment.

Those eyes did not contain a single grain of shyness or liveliness from the night before. She went back to calling Saito a "dog" and whipping him like she did a year ago. Only insults regarding her chest could make Louise this mad.

“That’s because I thought you should hear it from Tiffa! That’s why I kept silent!”

Saito, all muffled up in bandages, shouted. Louise looked down at him with demonic eyes.

“Haaaahn? Haaaaahn? Hear it from Tiffa? Your master comes first!”

Louise trampled down on Saito’s back. She twisted her heel against it; Saito struggled in pain.

“You. You got into your stride again? Recently, because I was a little sweet, did you misunderstand something? But now, you recalled it, right? You are a dog. No, dog is too high for you, you are more t-t-t-tttt-t-terrible.”

Louise's voice began to tremble.

“You are below dog! Amphibian! A gecko!”

Siesta corrected Louise,

“Miss Vallière, a gecko is a reptile.”

“Right. Then, you are a medusa! Medusa!”

Louise continued trampling Saito down.

“Maybe you should cease for now… Saito-san seems to be reflecting it…”

“Reflecting? This medusa is not capable of thinking. That’s right, only its body remembers.”

Swaying in slow motion, Saito stood up. With his whole body wrapped up in bandages, looking miserable, he decisively pointed a finger at Louise.

“What are you talking about! For what reason are you bullying a person with heavy magic and feet? The point is – I did not do it on purpose!”

Saito’s single phrase made Tiffania, who was watching Saito and others "communicate" in terror, blush. Siesta anxiously looked at Tiffania. Elves were considered to be strong in natural magic and were notorious for having bad relations with humans. Siesta was frightened to see an elf for the first time.

Noticing this reaction, Tiffania lowered her head.

“That’s right. I am scary after all. A half-breed.”

Though Siesta kept on alternately looking at Saito and Tiffania… she said, in a determined way,

“E-Elves are certainly scary, but… you helped Saito-san. And, you haven't tried to harm us. I'm sorry for being afraid.”

“Thank you.”

Tiffania smiled. Siesta answered with a smile of her own. However, Louise watched Tiffania suspiciously.

“Tsk, why is an elf here in Albion?”

“That…”

Faced with Louise’s clear hostility, Tiffania felt at a loss. Louise approached Tiffania and pulled her long ears.

“Au. Auau. Auu.”

Tiffania, having her ears pulled, moaned in a painful voice.

“Hmph. Not fake.”

“T-They're real…”

“…”

Then, Louise groped Tiffania’s chest. Tiffania, pushed by a girl smaller than her, covered herself.

“Huuh.”

“What is *THAT*?”

“C-Chest…”

“Chest.”

“Not lying. Really, it's the chest…”

“Crazy.”

Louise muttered from the bottom of her heart.

“Not really…”

“It’s strange, no matter how you think about it. Your shoulders and waist are so thin, but why is your chest so big? I-I-It’s not in balance with your lower body as well. Give me a break. If you were to walk like this in Tristain, you would be given a death penalty.”

“Even if you say so…”

Louise’s shoulders began to tremble.

“The level is different. The level. No super-size. I am like this, but I will not admit this chest. Yes, definitely, I won’t admit. Because the chest is defined by the way one likes it.”

“Au. Auauauaua. Auau.”

Without showing any signs of her anger decreasing, Louise shouted at Tiffania,

“Apologize! Apologize! Apologize to me! 'I’m sorry for having such boobs!' Now!”

“Hyaa”

While asking for the unjust apology, Louise kept on groping Tiffania’s chest, making her moan in tearful voice.

Saito stood up and shouted at Louise,

“You! Stop bullying Tiffa!”

Hearing him, Derflinger muttered,

“Both are supporters of the nothingness of the Void, but this one's chest is like a Void as well.”

“Besides, you would need to divide even that into half…” Siesta muttered.

“Kyaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

Louise’s kick flew straight between Saito’s legs.

“W-Why me…”

Painfully trampling on Saito, whose head covered in cold sweat, Louise said,

“Well, that's because, you groped those things! I will never forgive this for as long as I live! Alright then, she isn't the only secret you have right? You and that girl, what else are you hiding from me? Talk. What were you doing with her chest? Was it fun? Tell me – I won’t get mad. I will kill you though.”

Finally, Saito fainted in agony from Louise’s kick. Without changing her expression, Louise turned to Derflinger.

“Hey, wasted-sword! What did you say just now?”

“Void user?”

“Not that, the part about being the same?”

While still holding onto his aching groin, Saito stood up slowly. He threw a glance at Tiffania and when she nodded, his face became serious and he informed Louise,

“Tiffa… is the same as you, a Void user.”

By the time Tiffania finished explaining to Louise, lunch had already passed.

Tiffania said she wanted to talk about it at night, but, because of Louise’s constant pressing, she gave in.

Hesitantly, Tiffania spoke, though it was not easy for her to do that.

Her elf mother was a concubine of an archduke, Albion's King’s younger brother. Her father was the controller of the Royal Treasury, responsible for managing the Royal Family’s treasures. One day, she found a ring in the Royal Family Treasury, which fit with the music box she found before, yet, nobody could hear the melody but her.

Once it became public that an elf was a Royal Family member’s concubine, Albion’s King sent a knight corps. Thus, her father and mother died.

Then, once spell runes appeared in her head, she placed a "memory disappearance" spell on the knights, and survived…

“Is that a Void spell?”

Embarrassed, Tiffania looked at Derflinger.

“Indeed. "Forgetting" spell.”

“How can Void erase one’s memory?”

“Think about it. What was written in the preface of the Founder’s Prayer Book?”

“Magic elements govern small grains. Void governs even smaller particles…”

“Exactly. One can control a person’s brain with the help of those small particles. Memory and thoughts are connected with those small particles. 'Friendliness' and 'hostility' are just matter of difference in the flow of these small particles that void can change. However, 'forgetting' Void is different. It goes even further into these small grains and erases their existence completely of the central smallest particles.”

“So, you are saying that…”

“Anyway, the spell that the half-elf lass uses, is a true Void.”

Louise placed her hand on her chin, in a deep musing.

“I see. So, when Saito’s Void familiar contract wore out… there was no way for me to find him.”

Saito asked,

“How many are there of those Void users?”

“Maybe 4 people.”

“Maybe? What?”

“Brimir passed his treasure to four of his followers respectively. And in doing so, granting them power. Three of them created Halkeginia’s kingdoms. The users came as direct descendants from that lineage… therefore – four people.”

“Tristain, Albion, Galia and Romalia.”

“Then the one that attacked us the other day was one of those? So, not everyone is as gentle as Tiffania.”

Recalling Myoznitnirn's attacks on them, Saito said,

“Who knows. Even if they are descendants of the direct line, it’s thousands, no, tens of thousands of people that we are talking about. Naturally, between them

can be vicious and gentle ones. They're just like common people in that regard.”

“Anyway, what if all four users awaken their Void?”

“Who knows.”

“Stop talking as if it doesn't concern you!”

Saito said angrily.

"Hey, Derflinger.”

Louise said, in a serious tone.

“What?”

“Why do we have to get our Void awoken?”

Derflinger answered quickly,

“To regain the Holy Land. That’s what is written in the Founder's Prayer Book.”

Louise nodded, recalling.

“If the four Void’s users, rings, treasures and familiars are gathered…then, the power of Brimir becomes complete.”

“…What are Brimir’s powers?”

“I remember.”

“Derf?”

“It’s true. But… it exceeds my imagination. I’m not exaggerating. I don’t remember it well… I just absent-mindedly remember that it was huge.”

“And why have you never talked about it?”

Derflinger said, in an unusually tired voice,

“I don’t want to put these kind of things on your shoulders. It’s worrisome. That

one can be changed into a completely different person. The power that, with just a flick of a hand, can do such utter changes and, moreover, change one’s ideals. Do you understand, Louise?"

Louise, who was called on by Derflinger for the first time by her name, bit her lip.

To become a splendid noble – this was an ideal that she repeated in her mind over and over again. Because of that, she could not say the thing that should be said. Yet, she could not become obedient. It gave her no satisfaction. Not even to a single part of her.

“The thing is that possessing such ‘ideal’ power can make surrounding people unhappy.”

Saito, as well as Louise, became silent. Tiffania shivered, a frightened expression on her face.

“I am unchanged for as many as 6000 years. Though it was tedious, I was happy to experience them. Your histories are the same. Changing it through force or leaving it the way it is, if it exceeds one’s strength.”

“…”

“Hey, Partner?”

“What?”

“Since I met you, I remember various things. Happy things, serious things… difficult things. Various things. I am grateful. Just like Partner and Void user, Louise."

Saito nodded. Louise, with a blush on her cheeks, nodded, too.

“Now, if my love for the time we spent together would be changed to a bother now, then, the whole time spent together in the past would look bothersome as well.”

Saito gently said to Derflinger,

“Don’t worry. Ideals or Holy Lands are trivial things. All that I want is to defend important people. I can’t imagine myself hating it.”

Louise said it clearly as well,

“I understand that, even without you saying. I… have decided. For the time being, I will only search for a way to bring Saito home.”

Surprised, Saito looked at Louise.

“Do you have a fever?”

Louise silently kicked Saito straight between his legs. Saito rolled onto the floor in agony. Louise placed a foot on his back and said,

“I won’t use my power for that. No one should be treated as a tool. Therefore, do not worry, you cowardly sword.”

Derflinger replied, in a reassured manner,

“I see. If I say something wrong. Please…”

“Be it gentle or cruel, it does not matter… we'll deal with it anyway.”

Saito, while having his head pressed into the floor by Louise, protested,

“I told you, I did not touch her chest on purpose. It's a terrible misunderstanding.”

Louise crossed her arms and looked down at Saito. Seeing Louise casting side glances, the frightened Tiffania opened her mouth.

“I… also thought about returning to the Holy Land. But, it was nothing more than mere thoughts. I am still a half-elf… even though I succeeded Founder’s power, this does not change anything. Therefore, I cannot return to the sacred ground that elves fight for, right? No, I do not want to fight against anyone. That’s why I didn’t speak with others… and, whenever I was exposed – I erased his or her memory. That’s how it was until now.”

Tiffania asserted clearly.

Siesta, who silently listened to everyone’s words, nodded.

“Though I do not understand all the talk about magic… you seemed to be reaching consensus. So, how about making some food.”

Everyone, with the exception of Derflinger, looked at each other. They certainly were hungry.

“May I borrow the kitchen?” Siesta asked Tiffania brightly. Then, the doorknob turned and the door opened revealing Agnes, who entered into the room. She sat down on the sofa and informed everyone,

“Now then, vacation ends. I will return.”

“Huh?”

Saito and company looked at each other.

“I was sure we would stay for two or three more days…”

“The homecoming orders came.”

Agnes presented Louise the letter. As usual, it seemed to be brought by an owl.

“The other day, I reported about you being alive, and this one came in a hurry after that.”

“You informed the Princess about it?”

“Naturally. After all, I came here for that. You did become Miss Vallière's familiar again, right? Then, I guess there is no reason to hide it from Her Majesty.”

“However, I wanted to have some rest…”

“Then take some rest for another ten minutes.”

Louise and Agnes could not refuse Henrietta’s order to "come back."

“In five minutes, prepare for departure.”

Agnes ordered with the face of a musketeer commander. Siesta let out a lifeless, “Yeeeees!” as they had brought a lot of luggage together upon coming here.

“We will separate now. Yet, even though it was short, it was pleasant.”

Tiffania said with a smile. After thinking for a moment, Saito said,

“Hey, Tiffa…”

“What?”

“Why don’t you come with us?”

“…Eh?”

Though Louise tried to hit Saito, he quickly caught her hand.

“What are you trying to persuade her about?”

“It is not about persuading.”

Saito stared at Louise’s eyes for a moment. Faced with such serious power, Louise pulled away, puffed her cheeks, and fell silent.

“You said you wanted to see more of the world. So, why not come to Tristain for now?”

Tiffania shrank.

“However, I already told that I cannot come to the place and cause suspicion. I have the mixed blood of an elf. And, they are feared of... a lot...”

“We are not afraid of you.”

“Right, you helped us… You cannot be a bad person.”

Saito nodded.

“True. So, if someone says anything, I will protect you. If they are scared, I will convince them.”

“Saito!”

“Just be silent for now, all right?”

Being stared at by Saito again, Louise turned her face down and puffed her lips.

“Do you want to see a different world?”

Tiffania smiled while looking down.

“Thank you.”

“Then, please prepare. It’s all right. We will wait.”

“We must hurry home, it is an order from the Princesss!”

Louise protested further. Not having anything else to argue about, she even accused him of disobeying Henrietta’s orders… To Saito, it reminded him of a child who did not want to lose face in an argument.

Yet… Tiffania did not move.

“Tiffa?”

“In any case… I cannot do it.”

“Why not? Do not be afraid. Tiffa helped me before. Now it is my turn to help.”

Tiffania pointed at the living room’s door. From the opening of the door, children of the Westwood Village were anxiously looking at the unfolding scene before them.

“I cannot leave these children alone.”

“Ah.”

Saito was slightly ashamed of himself. Due to his haste, he forgot. No, not only did Tiffania live here, but children as well… Tiffania was their parent and an elder sister at the same time.

“That's right. I cannot ask that from you. Sorry.”

“No. I am glad you invited me. Thank you.”

Tiffania gave an sincere smile. When someone as beautiful as Tiffania showed that sort of fairy-like smile, one can't help but to feel one’s sinful nature and avert his or her eyes.

“…In that case, is there anything we can do for you? I would like to at least express my gratitude.”

“It’s all right.”

“You saved my life.”

“You were in trouble and I helped. It’s a natural thing to do. Don’t worry about it.”

Though Saito tried to think of many words to express his gratitude… the only ones he could find were: "thank you."

“…Please, tell me if you are in the trouble. I will come over flying right away.”

“Ah, thank you. I am glad to have been able to meet you. So please, be happy.”

“Tiffa, you too. See you again.”

Tiffania, with a startled expression on her face, nodded.

“Yes. Again… See you again.”

"We’ll come to visit whenever we're in Rosais."

Though Agnes said that while walking down the forest footpath… Saito did not react. Louise, disliking Saito being this way, complained,

“Is something wrong?”

“No…”

“Well, that half-elf lass was beautiful. You miss her huge chest?”

Derflinger, on his shoulder, chirped in.

Louise's eyes narrowed.

“Wrong! It’s just that I can’t do anything, so pitiable…”

Yet, Louise made a sulky, "Hmph!" and started to walk away from Saito.

Seemed like she was offended by something.

Saito halted and looked back at the Westwood Village where he spent nearly two months. Almost completely hidden by the trees, the tiny house of Tiffania could be seen.

"I want to see the world…" Saito muttered to himself.

That time… he felt something swell in his chest.

Yesterday, when in the garden of Tiffania's house, Siesta asked, "What is Saito-san's dream?" He avoided thinking about it…

What do I want to do?

To find a way to return.

But, there is more. Another thing that contradicts it.

To defend Louise.

To be near her, to stay close to this girl.

If he were to find a way to return, then, he would separated from Louise as well.

Sooner or later, he would have to choose one of them.

And, what would his answer be?

It would hurt to leave Louise.

It would hurt to leave everyone with whom he was getting along well.

I want to return, but, though these feelings are not false... parting is the more difficult thing to do. Saito thought.

…Dream

To stay here in this world… Would it be a bad choice?

From the intensive training with Agnes, he somewhat gained more confidence as well.

To protect Louise… this is a test to myself. Some of that power belongs to me.

“Saito-saan! Come!”

Hearing the voice of Siesta, who walked ahead… Saito walked down the road to the plains of Saxe-Gotha, leading back to Tristain.

There were a lot of ships lined up near the iron tower of the Rosais port. Merchant ships from each of Halkeginia’s countries, warships – many ships were standing in the line waiting to leave the port.

A massive ship stood out among them.

It was the missed *Varsenda* ship. One could recognize it from the huge mast. It towered above the iron tower, making it look incredibly small next to the mothership – Saito sighed.

“What a great ship we have…”

The bottom of a ship, like the wooden mosaic, was decorated with splendid geometrical patterns. The gangway descending from the side of the deck was connected with the pier post of the iron tower.

Agnes muttered to herself.

“Though it was said that they will send a ship for us… but the *Varsenda*… Surprising.”

Saito and Louise were popeyed.

“Huh? What did you say just now?”

“I said – the *Varsenda* was sent for us.”

“Such a huge ship? For just a few of us?”

Saito was amazed.

“That is right. You are such a VIP. Great, isn’t it?”

Though pleased, Saito was also frightened. Louise looked doubtful.

“Maybe it’s not for me, but for you?” Saito said while looking at Louise.

“No. I haven’t told the Princess about going to Albion. For me alone, such ship would have never been used. Just think how much it would cost just to move such a thing?”

Then, it’s for me alone?

What on earth was Henrietta thinking about?

Once Saito rose up the gangway, the commander of the warship met him.

“Are you Hiragaru Saitoon?”

Though he was called by an incredibly distorted name, Saito nodded.

The commander of a warship looked at Saito with a suspicious face. Why was *Varsenda* sent to pick up such a commoner? That sort of face. Though Saito had been on the ship before, he had not met with the captain. Therefore the captain was unaware who Saito was.

Even though he did not know such a character, an order is an order anyway, so the commander of the warship could do nothing but salute Saito, who was Her Majesty's guest.

“On behalf of this warship, I welcome you. The safety of your cruise is assured.”

The officer guided Saito and the others to a luxurious room. Then, the commander of the warship gave out a smile that didn’t reach his eyes.

“What on earth did you do to earn this kind of treatment? I was surprised.”

Aah, Saito finally understood. This warm reception was all because he held back the 70,000 strong enemy forces. Yet, the commander was unaware of it. In fact, probably only the highest ranked army officers knew about it.

“Hmm… what indeed.”

Anyway, not wanting to brag about it, Saito pretended not to know.

And so they were guided to the room where their luggage was placed. The port of Tristain, La Rochelle, was scheduled to be reached in almost half of the day.

“No one believes that you held back the Albion army…”

When Louise muttered, Agnes retorted.

“Yet, Her Majesty believed.”

“The Princess? Where did she heard about that?”

“Well. I don't know from where.”

Then Agnes flopped onto the seat, and closed her eyes.

Saito looked at his parka, which became worn-out after the recent fight. He did not worry about it in the forest… but to meet the Princess in such clothes could be considered an insult, right? He started to think.

“Hey Louise. I want new clothes…”

“Haaah? There is no money left. I’ve spent everything on this trip. Endure.”

Hearing that, Saito’s shoulders dropped lonesomely.

Louise that evening was faking after all… and it hurt.

“The day when I met you, you were so cute…”

When Saito unconsciously muttered it out loudly, Louise stared at him. And blushed. Then Louise turned around, showing her back to Saito.

“T-Then ask for a bigger reward! But not from the Princess, though you did a moderate job, it is not enough!”

Louise said, while a suggestive embarrassment colored her cheeks. Because she did not want to show such a face, she turned her back to Saito.

Such a reward… too much.

“What! A reward from her would be suitable!”

“Heeh. So that’s what your greedy intentions were all along!”

Louise turned around with a sneer.

Because of that, Saito became completely conceited.

“Then what reward and from whom?”

The vein on Louise’s temple started to throb.

“W-What about your master’s breasts?”

“What are you calling breasts.”

Then, Agnes tapped Louise and Saito's shoulders.

“Hey! Hey! You are not the only passengers.”

Suddenly aware of her surroundings, Louise crimsoned.

Siesta, with her lips pressed into a thin, tight line, watched the unfolding scene.

“Hmph!” as they both turned their faces away from each other.

“Haaah, fighting over such things…”

Agnes said while laughing.

Louise, through the corner of her eye, was watching Saito, who now was sulkily looking outside the window.

Why am I so angry and frustrated?

Is it because Saito likes other good-looking girls?

When you look at me… it’s hard to call me charming.

He’s not obedient at all.

He’s only obedient to the girls like Siesta.

Or like that Tiffania… who, though unusual, was still better than me.

What part of me could win?

While thinking this, her confidence about "being liked" grew smaller. Even if he said "like," his real attitude may be the opposite still. She wanted to complain, but couldn’t place her mouth around that.

What if when she would ask if it’s true… he would confirm that he only said "I like you" just with his mouth… Louise bit her lips and couldn’t utter a word.

Chapter Four: The Chevalier Title

In a Royal Palace work room, Henrietta was waiting for the guest's arrival impatiently.

All schedules for the afternoon were canceled today. That’s why Mazarin, who usually complained about her working too hard every day, didn’t scold her.

It was an empty work room as, in addition to the riches, all the furniture was sold off. As might be expected, the desk that was used for the paper look-over was not present either. There was a worn-out desk, which was purchased in a second-hand articles shop instead.

There was also one old bookshelf standing lonesome in the corner of the room. If she were not wearing a crown, the visitor coming to the room would have never been able to guess that it was a queen’s work room.

“The wind dragon should be here from La Rochelle by now…”

Henrietta muttered, lifelessly placing her elbows on the desk.

Once a guard appeared, she asked the same question, “Are they here yet?” Henrietta repeated the same question many times over and over again, during the last few hours.

“Agnes-sama has not arrived yet.”

The guard gave the same answer again and again.

Henrietta bit her fingernails, a habit she picked up when she was a kid. Though she was criticized and eventually corrected, it revived recently again.

But that time, after asking if they arrived yet… the guard reported.

“Musketeer commander Agnes-sama has arrived!”

“Please invite her in at once.”

Henrietta stood up while saying that.

“We returned just now.”

Agnes, who entered the work room, bowed deeply. Seeing Louise and Saito waiting behind, like a rose, a smile bloomed on Henrietta’s lips. A sincere smile after a long time.

“I found and brought back Miss Vallière’s familiar.”

Saito and Louise bowed with a strained expression on their faces. They separated in La Rochelle from Siesta who returned to the academy, while the two came to the Royal Palace together with Agnes on a wind dragon.

There was nothing in this deserted, lonely room. Louise looked around unsure.

“Aah, sold all my furniture. Surprised?”

“Yeah…”

“There was no other way. Because the treasury became empty due to the war…”

Henrietta took Louise's hands.

“Louise, first of all, I have to apologize myself before you.”

“Princess…”

“The generals… Yes, I interrogated the generals who had taken command of the Albion invasion army. They seemed to have made unreasonable demands of you, Louise… Above all… They ordered you to hold back the enemy army. I’m sorry. It’s because of me. Your ‘Void’ was used under my command.”

With a painful expression on her face, Henrietta held Louise’s hands.

“I am sorry. I am a cruel woman. I am a helpless, sinful woman. I not only used your power for something I started myself, but I sent you away to that place to die.”

Agnes corrected Henrietta's words.

“The ones that forced Miss Vallière to stay using your words were the generals and not Your Majesty herself. Her Majesty also, as far as I remember, never was for such duty.”

Henrietta shook her head.

“No… it’s my responsibility. It was me who decided about the war. The possibility of such instructions being issued should have also been taken into consideration. Really, you are alive. I'm sorry Louise. Whatever words I say, it can't be enough for an apology…”

Feelings overtook Henrietta, and she began to weep.

“Pardon me, no, these are not the words for me to say.”

Seeing Henrietta like that, Louise instinctively became doleful as well.

“Princess, please do not worry. Louise Françoise dedicated herself to Her Majesty. It includes her death too. Therefore…”

Actually, it was me going to death, Saito thought, yet, of course, he did not say it aloud. With somewhat cold eyes, he watched the two girls embrace each other and sob.

After holding each other for a while, Louise remembered that she still had something to tell Henrietta about and separated herself.

“Princess… I have to tell an awful thing to you, just for your ears.”

“Oh dear! Sounds frightening! Please do! No, I must hear it. I have to listen to everything. Even if it is a dreadful thing that crushes the mind… now, please tell.”

And Louise told Henrietta.

She told about another familiar of Void that attacked them – a woman named Sheffield.

And how they met another Void user…

“Besides you, there are other Void users?”

Though Louise hesitated for a while, she also told Henrietta about Tiffania. That she was a half-elf. And that she could use a Void spell…

“Such a thing. Maybe you should bring her here as fast as possible.”

Louise shook her head.

“She hopes to live quietly. That spell is useful for defending oneself… in either case, what happened happened - she wanted to be left alone."

“Oh well… this does not necessarily imply that I'm not safe… You know, Louise, I did not want for you to do it by yourself. Yet, I do not have the Void. Neither did I want it for selfish purposes.”

Henrietta knew that Louise’s Void influenced the whole Albion invasion company quite a bit.

“I now understand; having such power can easily make one overly ambitious. I will be careful not to let such a thing ever happen. And I will make sure that others will be as well. Aah, if only I could do better. I want to leave you out of this whole mess. Really. Yes…”

Louise told Henrietta about the thing she learned from Derflinger.

“As for the Void users… assuming just from the number of royal family's treasures… there should be four people total.”

“What?! Four people bearing the Founder’s power?!”

“Among them, obviously, there are a few hostile ones.“

Henrietta gazed at Louise.

“Don’t worry Louise. I will personally make sure that no one lays a single finger on you… That’s an absolute must.”

Louise looked doubtful.

“A must?”

Not troubled, Henrietta tapped Louise’s shoulder while separating herself and then looked at Saito.

“Familiar-san. It was you, instead of Louise, who saved my retreating army.”

“Eh?”

“I heard it from the Albion general. He told me about everything.”

“Well, that, it just happened…”

“Thank you. Those words are not enough to express the gratitude I feel now. Really, thank you.”

Henrietta’s crowned head bowed many times. Saito, for the first time seeing a crown moving up and down, started to panic.

“W-Well… don’t lower your head. The Queen should not lower her head to anyone…”

“No… you are the hero. The hero who saved the mother country – Tristain. If not for you, my army would have been annihilated.”

Henrietta continued bowing a lot, which made Saito glad. At the same time, the pleasure that has not been felt until now, sprung out of the bottom of his heart.

Surely, back in Japan, he had never dreamed about being appreciated by a Queen this much.

“Though it is small, this is to show my gratitude. Please receive it.”

Gratitude? What could it be? Some gold coins again? Or…

Saito recalled the event in the cheap hotel at one time. *That night… Henrietta’s lips touched mine.* Well, could he calmly ask to kiss her back - Saito grew expectant and ashamed.

However, the words that Henrietta uttered, were beyond Saito's imagination.

“Please accept it.”

“Paper?”

It was a single parchment. It had a Tristain royal family arm imprinted on the left corner. Though it obviously was some kind of official document, Saito could neither write nor read. Louise protruded her face at his side and looked into the a paper – her eyes widened.

“It says you are to be consecrated as the commander of the Imperial Guards!”

“Consecrated?”

Saito, who could not grasp the importance of such a thing, blankly asked.

“It is so. It started since the battle at Tarbes, and in the past you helped me many times. That alone would be reason enough to make you an aristocrat. The withdrawal in Albion led to success at that time. The contribution that you brought to our country is one of a kind and unparalleled. You are a hero who should go down into history.”

Being called a hero by Henrietta made Saito glow. Still, Henrietta continued to persuade him.

“A hero has to be given an honor that matches his exploits. That’s what the general that confronted you said to me… and I think so as well. Thus I ask you – please lend me your power. You are important for me… no, for all people of Tristain.”

Saito finally understood the true feeling of VIP treatment. Being sought by Agnes, having a ship sent just for you - the purpose was not only to show appreciation for Saito's pains. *I was admitted as a necessary human for Tristain, that’s what such a big warship was given for.*

“But Princess, consecrating Saito, who is not a noble, as commander of the Imperial Guards? This cannot be allowed!”

Louise rattled in haste.

“Then why not make him a noble, Louise?”

“Well, because Saito is a commoner, that being said…”

“Because he is a human that comes from the different world? I heard it from Osman.”

“So why make such a person a noble?”

“Doesn‘t he have the qualifications of a noble? After all, a position in the kingdom's government gives noble status. Regardless of the position, the skillful ones should be consecrated. This is for Tristain's future. That‘s how I think.”

Henrietta said in admonished tone.

“But Saito is my familiar…”

“Yes. Of course, that thing doesn't change. In fact, if he becomes a noble, it will be easier for him to help you. You disagree?”

“But, but, my Void should remain a secret…”

“Of course, that secret will be kept. The fact that he is the familiar Gandálfr is known only by me, Agnes, Academy Director Osman, and top management of the country. Currently, he is just a soldier with excellent behavior and weapon-using skills.”

Louise could not object to such words any longer.

“However, this way I will not be able to find a way to return home…” Saito objected weakly, but Henrietta still stood her ground.

“The title of a knight commander will be useful while looking for the way to return.”

Saito dwelled on it.

…It might be as she said. If his position in this world goes up, there would be no limits for him. Saito knew that from spending quite some time with the nobles already.

“What do you say, Hiragasaito?”

Being called by his full name, Saito felt nervous. Otherwise, he was not interested in a noble's position. However… being admitted among people – that's what Saito desired. Being needed by Henrietta, consequently, means being needed by this entire country. Moreover, it will be easy to look for a way to return.

Aah, it was kind of similar to a test taken with his mind set. Like studying during old times… though he was rather stupid, he still was glad when he was praised for the marks. The pleasure of that time, just now a 100, a 1000 times more intense, caught Saito.

However… A knight commander? Wasn't that sort of responsibility from some standpoints impossible? But it was attractive. Promotion, promotion… such charm could not be disputed easily.

"…Let me think about it for a moment."

Louise watched Saito with an insecure face.

Henrietta smiled.

"I see. Taking the position of the commander of the Imperial Guards should be taken after one becomes determined. However, you cannot refuse me giving you the title of Chevalier. If you were to refuse it, then I would be disgraced myself."

Saito shyly looked at Louise.

Yet Louise seemed to be at a loss herself.

Henrietta kept persuading further.

"I can't allow Louise's Void to be targeted by other users. For the name of the deed, a knight that will protect Louise is needed. Consequently, I would be defended as well."

After hearing her say so, Louise nodded.

"You understand. I am glad, Louise."

Then aiming at Saito, Henrietta pointed out a wand with a big light blue crystal

at the end of it.

“Though it is informal… In such place accolade can be done as well. Please kneel.”

Once Henrietta’s tone switched to a majestic Queen’s, Saito knelt down instinctively.

“Please close your eyes.”

As told, he closed his eyes. The tension ran through the body. It was wrapped in exhilarating heat.

No way, I’m becoming a noble…

He never dreamed of such a thing, really.

“Bow your head down.”

Saito bowed. Though he was not really mentally prepared, the ceremony advanced indifferently.

Then he felt something heavy being placed on his right shoulder.

The wand. It was Henrietta's wand placed on his right shoulder.

As if words of prayer, the royal edict of promoting to knighthood, came out of Henrietta's mouth.

“I, Queen of Tristain, Henrietta, give my blessings and the title of Knight to this person. This person is an owner of a noble soul, unmatched with no equals. Do you swear unwavering loyalty to me, the country, and the Founder?”

Saito was silent. Could he really make an oath for such loyalty? After all, it was unpalatable to tell a lie during an important ceremony. Noticing Saito’s feelings, Henrietta smiled.

“It’s all right. You are a human that came from another place. Loyalty that doesn't exist in the mind cannot be sworn. I will take it as conceded thing.”

“Princess.”

Louise instinctively opened her mouth. She never heard of an accolade like that.

“It’s all right. It was me who made the request to begin with. I asked him to become a knight.”

Henrietta‘s face became solemn again as she continued the words.

“Owner of noble soul, that is unmatched with no equals, do you swear fidelity to the place where your heart is, the place that your soul desires?”

Though he still did not understand it well… but this meant that Saito could leave. Thus, there were no problems anymore.

”…I swear.”

“Good. Then in the name of Founder Brimir, I consecrate you into the knights.”

Henrietta first tapped Saito’s right shoulder twice, then the left one.

That was how simply Saito was consecrated into knights.

After the consecration ended, Henrietta let Saito stand up.

“After this, lend a little bit of your power to this weak Queen as well, Chevalier Saito-dono.”

Tired from travel, Louise and Saito spent one night in the Royal Palace. Because of tiredness, they both fell soundly asleep.

Henrietta, once the couple left, dwelled on the two countries' problems… she ordered an investigation into Gallia’s and Romalia’s Void users, who tried to harm the two. As soon as something became clear, she would tell them both.

So, Saito and Louise could put their hearts at ease a little. If they had an entire country to back them up, the enemy would not be able to attack them that easily.

In addition to that, they normally stayed in the Magic Academy, in other words, the place where magicians were gathered, and even for a "Void user", this would be an opponent way out of their league.

The next morning, when the wind dragon brought them back to Tristain‘s school, Saito strengthened his grip on the mantle given to him by Henrietta. On the velvet-black fabric, a small, blue Lily crest was placed - the symbol of the "Chevalier" title, that was attached on the chest for all Tristain to see. Seeing that, Agnes muttered,

“Wear it.”“

Saito nodded and put the mantle on. It was placed on his worn-out parka that had big holes in it. *Now I just want new clothes.…* he mused, not thinking about it as a symbol of Halkeginia’s nobility.

“It suits you well, doesn’t it?”

Agnes said in the voice of a teacher who was proud with a student's promotion. However, Louise, who was sitting next to Saito, turned her sullen face away, not looking at him.

“Now I am a chevalier. How about it?”

In a little excited voice he said to Louise sitting next to him.

“What about you, though it might be easier to do various things now.”

Louise pointed her lip, and muttered sulkily.

Really… what about becoming a Chevalier.

Haven’t I said before. I want to find a way for you to return home.

It is just a title, so why I am feeling down?

“Anyway, now I am finally equal to you, Louise.” Saying something like that with a smile ticked Louise off.

“Huh? Equal to whom? Comparing Chevalier with the House of Vallière is like

comparing a lizard to a noble. No, a lizard is too good – a bug at most!”

Sulking, Saito turned away. "Haah," Louise let out a sigh.

My feelings contradicted my words.

Though I should be thinking about how to return Saito home… I was happy about Saito becoming a Chevalier for different reasons.

I thought that when a partner is a chevalier, then admitting my relationship to my father, a duke, was possible.

Louise, trembling, shook her head.

Haven’t I already decided to "look for a way to bring him home," but for what reason am I happy for?

It’s no good to have my feelings impede my decisions, I cannot permit that, strangely thought the serious Louise.

And as if struggling with her own consciousness was not enough, Saito was so carefree and happy with the mantle. Human nature is a mystery… Louise bit her lips.

Besides, somehow, there were feelings of insecurity too.

Now that he is a Chevalier… new girls could try to approach him, right? A rival who is stronger than the housemaid might show up

I wonder whether I can beat such competition?

Having "zero" girlish charms, could she still attract her familiar against another girl’s charms? This uneasiness, mixed with feelings of self-blame, made her say such stinging words a little while ago… of course, Saito did not see what was going on Louise's mind.

Can’t you understand my feelings a little? Louise let out another sigh.

The wind dragon arrived at Tristain's Academy of Magic after one hour of flight.

Upon seeing the shapes of five towers in the distance, Saito felt nostalgic feelings swelling. Louise had similar feelings as well. Gradually, their eyes could see the whole Academy of Magic.

Somehow, the feeling was like returning back to one's hometown.

Though because he was from different world, there were no hometowns here… Saito wondered about these feelings.

When the wind dragon landed on Austri Plaza, tens of students ran up.

As Saito started wondering about it, a boy with blond hair cried out slowly.

“Saito! You are alive! I am glad!”

It was Guiche.

“Uwaaa! Wh-what?!”

“Yesterday came a report to the school from the Royal Palace.”

Next to Guiche, with a smile, stood the plumpy Malicorne.

“From the Royal Palace?”

“Aye. That you were alive.”

“That… did you really stop 70,000 troops of the Albion army?!”

Guiche, who had gotten excited, talked volubly. Apparently Henrietta gave out information even about such event.

“The ones that gathered here participated in the Albion campaign as student officers; our colleagues survived thanks to you.”

The students, with expressions of gratitude, said loudly to Saito,

“My corps was the last one to get on the ship. What would have happened to us

if you hadn’t stopped them!”

“You are a person to whom I owe my life. To tell the truth, I thought it was the end.”

Surrounded by tens of noble students, Saito‘s discomfort worsened. That is to say, he was embarrassed to be given gratitude in such a way.

Guiche said with a clarified face,

“Yet I… I believed. That you were still alive.”

“Weren’t you making a bronze statue while thinking about his death?”

Montmorency came out from the mass of people and said.

“You are all right. I am glad. When Louise said - ‘He is absolutely alive!’ I thought she had gone crazy.”

Montmorency noticed the mantle that Saito wore. After that, she gave the crest on his chest a long, hard look.

“Can’t be – you're a Chevalier!”

“Whaaat?!”

Guiche was surprised as well and inventively studied the five blossoms of argent sewed onto the mantle.

“It is true. Great, isn’t it?! Everyone! Look! Saito is a Chevalier!”

“Oooh!” shouts of joy boiled.

“Noo, I knew it was going to happen some day. He was the man my golems had trouble cornering.”

“Did they corner him? Weren’t you defeated?”

Montmorency said mercilessly, in a stony voice; Guiche shook his head.

“It might be so. I cannot remember it so well. Aahahaha!”

Among this noise, Saito recalled a certain thing.

“That is right! I haven’t thanked the teacher yet!”

It is so.

It was necessary to thank Colbert who added the classified weapons to the Zero Fighter while preparing it for the *Varsenda*. Thanks to those classified weapons, the amphibious landing succeeded. He also wanted to report his promotion. Since it was Colbert, he will certainly be happy, pleased possibly.

“The teacher?”

“Teacher?”

Guiche was dumbstruck.

“Colbert-sensei.”

Students who gathered around, simultaneously pulled away.

Guiche awkwardly stole a glance at Montmorency’s face.

“Wh-What?”

Sensing a strange atmosphere, Saito asked.

“Ah, can you do it tomorrow? I guess you must be dead tired today.”

“Yeah. That’s a good idea.”

“What is going on here?”

“At least tomorrow…”

Saito shouted gripping Guiche's shoulder.

“Hey!”

In the Colbert's laboratory, built in the artillery tower, Saito was quietly sitting on a chair.

He did not stir.

…However, sometimes, his body shook.

Behind him, with worried expressions on their faces, Guiche and Montmorency stood. The figure of Malicorne could be seen as well.

Slight dust covered the laboratory as several months had passed since the master was gone. Taking up a beaker, which already turned darker inside, Saito muttered,

“It’s not true.”

Montmorency explained in a sinking voice.

“The school was attacked by thieves… He confronted them to help us… Though we foolishly kept calling him a coward…”

Guiche silently held Montmorency's shoulders. The couple stepped out, drawing close to each other. Malicorne quietly chased after them.

Saito wordlessly watched the beaker and muttered.

“I… when the Princess said that I would be promoted to a Chevalier, I was glad. I thought, that I was finally being acknowledged… That was because I never had such an experience when I was in Japan, and that I had never done anything that would get me praise or acknowledgement from the adults, so I felt very happy. The teacher always acknowledged me. He always listened attentively to my words. I, I was happy. Even though I was commoner, I was not looked down upon… I was happy. He was only a teacher. Yet he treated me as equally as the other nobles in this school…”

From Saito's eyes, tears started to fall. Tears, like water, rolled down his cheeks and chin.

“Teacher, I have become a knight, you know, a chevalier to boot too. You will feel happy for me, right? Why don't you praise me, please? Why don't you say how well I did there, teacher, please....”

Saito, while crying, muttered many times,

“…I, I wanted teacher's praise.”

Louise watched Saito from the entrance. Though she started to approach… her foot steps stopped on their own.

What could I say to comfort him?

Colbert and Saito surpassed the differences of the worlds, Louise remembered them getting along well. For Saito… he must have been a person who he was able to trust in.

What could I ever say to comfort Saito who lost such an important person?

Louise closed her eyes.

Seeing how Saito was deeply immersed in sadness made Louise feel the same.

It was late at night… when Saito returned to their room. Not being able to bear Saito being like that anymore, Louise, who returned back to the room some time ago, pushed her head out of the sheets. Saito was silently sitting on a chair.

Still… like before, not knowing what to say, Louise quietly watched Saito.

Scrubbing his red eyes, Saito opened his mouth.

And muttered in soliloquy,

“…Teacher once said that, 'I wanted to used the power of Fire to make everyone happy'. So teacher.....must have given his all to challenge what he could have done.”

“…”

“I… I do not think I can do that. Of course, teacher and I are different. I thought I could do magic… ‘using any weapon,’ but I lost it recently… But there must be

some things that even I can do. Can I do anything in this world? I do have that power, right? Power for something… as you said power ‘for something big,’ I want to use it.”

“…”

“I do not want to have any regrets when returning to my former world. Of course, I will protect you, and the Princess that you value, I will defend her. That’s something I can do, right? I think so… I will try to be a knight corps commander. Ok?”

Louise nodded.

Once in bed again, Louise was aimlessly tossing herself on sheets, thinking.

Though she was going to find the way for Saito to return… Saito became Chevalier, and consequently, as he said, he will become a knight commander.

In other words, Saito will try to find his world this way.

Am I happy for Saito because of that?

I do not know for sure.

The way I am changing, Saito is changing too.

And I do not know if it’s good or not.

To be honest, it's not like she opposed Saito becoming a chevalier. But this position has some obligations, too. Can Saito do it?

Remembering Colbert, Saito started to cry again.

I am useless; Louise was ashamed of her own powerlessness. Though she felt sorry for Saito so much… she could not do a single thing to comfort him.

An inferiority complex gradually gripped Louise's heart.

Yet, I am a Void user… can’t the owner of the legendary element do anything?

Maybe, I wonder myself, if I could help Saito in this world?

I think so.

Louise shook her head, and looked up.

I have to be confident now. She tried to persuade herself.

I have to do something for Saito, who lies next to me without turning.

…But, she did not know what.

Louise looked up at the night sky.

Two moons were drawing close, as if comforting them, pouring their gentle light into the room.

Chapter Five: Ondine Knight Corps of The Water Spirit

Saito publicly became a noble, but his life did not change very much.

Because the "Chevalier" title came with an annuity, his financial status became somewhat more stable, although his life did not change drastically.

Despite the different places, the living expenses in Tristain per person was 120 Ecu. The sum of annuity Saito received was 500 Ecu. It was a sum with which a commoner's family of four could live quite comfortably. It was something like the income of the lower class nobles without any lands.

At the start of every month, he would receive a sum of money which amounted to one twelfth of his annuity from the finance office. Therefore, every month, Saito had to bring his “Chevalier” letter of appointment, and squeeze with the other lower class nobles who would be trying to take their salary or annuity at the Tristain's finance office's counter.

The place he lived in was still unchanged- Louise's room. Although there were other rooms available if he wanted to rent a room, Louise disliked the notion. "Aren't you wasting your extra money?" Louise said.

For the time being, according to Louise's suggestion that it was indispensable in his service to the knight corps, Saito borrowed the annuity in advance and bought a horse.

It was grey and sleek-looking, and was quite a good army horse.

And influenced by Louise's advice that a good rider needed not just a good horse but also a good harness, he bought a good harness as well. His two months' annuity almost disappeared just like that. Because an angry Louise would not cease to bother him and let him win, Saito bought the horse and the harness reluctantly.

But, he was not satisfied, and in the beginning, Saito named the horse “Louise.”

“Louise. If you want a carrot, neigh.”

“Yo! Louise. We're having a long ride today, hang on there, run! If you're slow, I'll punish you! Get it?”

While he was mimicking Louise's mouth, him releasing his small resentments was quickly discovered.

“I prohibit you from naming the horse 'Louise'!”

His cheek was twice its size after being hit by Louise, so Saito changed the name of the horse.

As for the rest of the money, a hangar for the Zero Fighter, which was taken down from the *Varsenda*, was built beside Colbert's laboratory using wood and metal sheets for protection from the rain.

He thought of visiting Colbert's grave, but apparently Kirche had taken the corpse of the teacher, who did not have any relatives, to her parents' home. Tabitha had gone along as well. He did not understand the reason Kirche did so, but once she comes back from Germania, he would ask her about the location of the grave, and would visit him someday, Saito thought.

Well then, regarding Louise's familiar who had become a noble suddenly, the people at the Academy of Magic had different responses.

The headmaster, Osman, was delighted.

“You can bury your bones in this world, huh?” His eyes narrowed. “I don't have any intention to do so,” when Saito explained, “In the future you'd say that because you don't have a wife, so to commemorate your becoming a noble, why don't you marry my niece and fortify your body? Although she married four times, failed them, and is forty-years old, she is still not bad.” At those words, Saito ran away.

As for Chevreuse the Red Clay, “Well...” she narrowed her eyes and was pleased.

Miss Vallière was also proud at this, as her feelings leaked out. “Are you taking classes here as well? If you are, buy this book and this book and that book. Although they are expensive, they are useful.” She started recommending her books which were used as textbooks. Saito ran away again.

Well then, the ones among the teachers who were happy were only those two. The rest did not look very happy. Just like before, they ignored Saito like the air. There were also teachers who whispered, “I don't agree with his promotion.” As expected, the ones who were angered, because Saito who was once their companions, was now their superior, just ignored him.

The students' reactions were different as well.

Making fun of the ascent of a commoner, their minds did not think properly. Things like being afraid to approach Saito because of his war achievements, indifference...

That incident is fabricated, he is just a commoner, don't be so proud, et cetera... Students who did this consisted of about half of the total ones. “Well, it's okay if you want to challenge me,” whenever Saito said that, duels would be provoked.

Well, they were at Guiche's level for him to defeat, at most. “I stopped the 70,000, there's no mistake about it.” Saito caused them to change their opinion about his ability after they tasted defeat from him.

He had beaten the hell out of at most three persons simultaneously at Vestri Courtyard, and they did not insult him anymore.

A fortnight after Saito became a noble...

In the midst of the morning haze, at Vestri Courtyard, one by one, students appeared. They were all participants in the Albion war in one way or another.

With easily nervous-looking appearances, they stared at the two persons who were standing in front of them.

In a black mantle, Guiche, and Saito.

Whether or not it was due to nervousness, Guiche stiffened.

Saito poked Guiche's elbow.

“Wh-What?”

“Aren't you the Commanding Officer? Address them properly!”

“Uu...”

Guiche groaned.

“What's the problem!?”

“My stomach hu-hurts...”

The students who gathered exploded in laughter.

“...Hang in there!” Mixed with sighs, Saito said.

“As I thought, isn't it better for you to become Commanding Officer? I am too heavy a baggage to be the Commanding Officer of Ondine Knight Corps of the Water Spirit.”

Troubled, Guiche said.

Ondine...

Under the prodding of Henrietta, this Imperial Guards corps was formed 3 days after Saito returned to the Academy of Magic. After making his resolution, he immediately went to Henrietta and was informed of his assuming the position of Commanding Officer of the knights. After that, Henrietta suggested the forming of a new knight corps, and this was carried out.

The legendary Imperial Guards had a glory which existed in the past. That knight corps, which was capped with the name of the Water Spirit in the deep

waters of the Tristain royal family and its surrounding, was established thousands of years ago.

However, during the political disorder a few hundred years ago, it was abolished, until now...when Henrietta picked that name again.

“Don't care what type of history it has.”

Saito said to Guiche.

Guiche and the others thought that it was possibly the name of the legendary knight corps, but, as for Saito, when he thought about it, he neither had awe nor yearning.

“B-But...though I am the commanding officer of the legendary knight corps, it means, umm...”

Guiche rolled his eyes in difficulty.

At first, Saito thought he would be the Commanding Officer, but... “Someone who was promoted from a commoner to suddenly become a commanding officer, he'd be under a lot of pressure.” Listening to Agnes' words, he abandoned his plans. He did not want to provoke needless jealousy.

Eventually, after discussions with Louise, for the time being Guiche would be the Commanding Officer, and Saito the Assistant Commanding Officer.

Henrietta wanted Saito to be the Commanding Officer, but, as expected, Saito was not well-rehearsed with the rules of this world, not a mage, and a formally strange human who could not do things.

Guiche had made some achievements at the city of Saxe-Gotha, had received a medal, and besides, his father was a general in the army. Although his appearance, ability, or experience might be insufficient, based on his lineage and war achievements, there would be no objections to his becoming the Commanding Officer of the knight corps.

“Oi, Guiche! Saito! Until when do you want to talk? Start the training! Don't you all want to train us until we're exhausted!?”

At these two slowpokes, the students who had become the members of the knight corps, shouted.

Anyone who looked around could tell that Ondine was made up of students from the Academy of Magic. Henrietta had established the third Imperial Guard corps after the Magic Imperial Guards and the Musketeer Corps with youths who were not from the factions of the society or the palace.

“Hey, because you are slow, shouldn't you not complain?”

Saito spoke while poking Guiche's cheek. Guiche answered back undauntedly as well,

“Aren't you the one who does nothing but complain?”

“Because you're pathetic!”

“That's why I said that you should become the Commanding Officer!”

Both of them glared at each other. Suddenly, Saito turned his face away, and declared in a slightly contemptuous tone,

“...Damn. Because of that, Monmon did not forgive you, isn't it?”

At that instant, Guiche cut in.

“My affairs with Monmon has noooooooothing tooooo doooooo wiiiiiiith yooooooouuuuu!”

Half weeping, Guiche pulled out his wand.

“Interesting... Oh right, I haven't settled the score with you the other time!”

Saito let out a bellow and grasped Derflinger with his hand. The runes on his left hand shone. Guiche put down his wand and clenched his fist. Chevalier Saito was the man who stopped the 70,000. *When he has a weapon, I have no chance to win.*

“Because you can't use magic, too bad! Let's fight bare-handed!”

Saito released Derflinger, and leaped towards Guiche.

The gathered students were ecstatic as well.

“Get him! Punish that impertinent commoner! Guiche!”

“Oi, Saito! Go get that prideful Guiche!”

From a bench a distance away, two girls were watching the beginning of the loud scuffle between Saito and Guiche. They were Louise and Montmorency. For some reason or another, every morning before breakfast, they would watch the scenery of Saito and the others' trainings.

“Geez. After the war, now it's make-believe knights? No matter how you think about it, looks like it's a quarrel this time. Huh, boys... Guess it really can't be helped, huh?”

Montmorency said in an amazed voice.

Speaking of Louise, since some time ago, she was doing something with an unusually nervous look.

“...What are you doing?”

With a slightly irritated voice, Louise replied.

“Mending something.”

At one look, it was indeed the parka Saito wore. Holes where everywhere all over it. Louise was mending it somehow with great difficulty. But...no matter what, she was unskilled. With her thread entangled in a complicated way, the holes which were supposed to be mended were conversely bigger.

“Aren't you making it worse?”

“Sh't up.”

“To mend something, isn't it better to call a maid to do it?”

“It's alright. I'll do it.”

While Louise was groaning *mmm*... she started mending the parka again.

“Louise, you haven't changed at all, huh?”

“Why?”

“Nope... mending a torn boy's shirt... girls who fall in love change, huh? I wonder.”

Louise lifted her face hastily. Her face reddened.

“Love, neeeevvvveeeerrrrr! A t-torn parka is pi-pipi-pitiable, so I'm s-sewing it. That's all!”

“You're so disorientated. As if you had admitted it yourself.”

“Truthfully, I don't want to do it! Aaahh, sorry! Geez!”

While she said that, she was moving the needle painstakingly.

Louise was trying to think of a way to help Saito who was engrossed in the knight corps. But, she was not a member of the knight corps... No matter how much she thought about the things she could do, she did not know of any at all. For the time being, she would just mend his parka.

When it came to Saito, like an idiot, he became engrossed in striving for the organization and the training of the knight corps. Because of that, the moment classes ended, he would train them. Returning to the room after he was worn out, he would sleep after that. Every morning, just like that, since dusk, he'd be very busy gathering with the other knight trainees, swinging their swords, practicing using magic all at once, and sparring.

He practically left Louise alone.

It was just like an attitude of “I don't need your help.”

That is, well...maybe because Louise was not a member of the knight corps, to which nothing could be done.

Huhhh... Louise let out a small sigh.

She could not amuse Saito well, and could not help him as well. As she thought of that, her self-confidence wavered even more.

As I thought, I can't do it, huh...? Tears welled in her eyes. With the sharpness of a Water user, Montmorency noticed Louise's agony, and narrowed her eyes.

“Whhhhat? Are you uncomfortable anywhere? Well, a lover who neglects you and engrosses himself in other things; so you become dispirited, huh?”

“Haah? What are you talking about? What lover? Stop it!”

“Am I wrong? Weelll, is it a secret crush then? Naturally, you towards Saito.”

“Wrong! Absolutely wrong! Completely different from love! I never think of him at all!”

Blushing deeply, Louise protested.

“It's fine. But let me give you a warning.”

“What is it!?”

“Although you like him, you cannot allow him immediately.”

“Haaaa! What are you saying!? Isn't that stupid!?”

“A person like you appears to be firm on the outside, but you flow according to the ambiance easily. Listen. Men are all unfaithful beings. 'A little bit is okay,' when you unintentionally allow him too much, he'll lose interest in you and go find other girls.”

“St-Stupid! There's no reason to allow them! Allow what!?”

Ignoring the things she did in the past, Louise yelled.

“Your voice is shaking. When you are struck at the bull's eye, you would be shaky immediately, eh? But you don't have to worry. Lately you are left aside by him, right? A completely frustrated woman is a no-no. Because of only little things, you get irritated, huh?”

“Haaaaahhhh!? The one's who's left aside, isn't it you!? Montmorency the Fragrance. What are you doing at such a place? To look out for Guiche? That idiot unexpectedly received a medal, and now he's getting more attention than before, eh? The girls who like him even like that, should have increased, right!?”

Chonchon. Montmorency hit Louise's shoulder, and pointed towards Saito's direction.

She looked, and noticed that the scuffle had ended before they realized.

“Eh?”

Louise stared, pop-eyed.

A certain girl wearing a light brown mantle was handing something to Saito.

“Looks like the one getting the attention isn't Guiche, eh?”

“What's wrong?”

Saito asked the girl in front of him.

The one in front of him with her cheeks crimson red was the girl who had once two-timed with Guiche... Katie. Beside them were a few fellow female academy students who were staring at Saito with similar expressions. All of them were wearing light brown mantles... which meant that they were first-year students.

“Um-Umm... do you want to read this?”

With a bashfully radiant face, the long-haired, lovely Katie took out something which looked like a letter.

“I-I wrote it as well.”

“Please look at it.”

The other female students handed their letters to Saito one by one as well.

“Letter?”

“Umm... I wrote a poem. By all means, please read it.”

With his mouth agape, he asked the girls of the lower grade.

“...Why me?”

The girls exchanged glances and nodded in unison.

“Because, you are so cool. You could stop 70,000 military troops alone right?”

“Next time when you are free, could you please tell us more about it?”

From behind, Guiche's bitter voice could be heard.

“Wh-What about me? No letters for me!?”

“Guiche-sama already has Montmorency-sama right?”

Aloof, Katie declared clearly.

“You girls are always the best, all the time! Montmorency is Montmorency, you are you! I say! A valorous man only has love for courage and achievements! Please understand!”

Shouting that, Guiche bit on his rose and put on airs. But at that moment, a cluster of water enveloped Guiche's body.

“Ugh! Aargh! I-I! I can't br-breath... ughhh...”

In the water column, Guiche was in agony. Before they noticed it, Montmorency was already on her feet, wielding her wand. Expressionless, and very frightening-looking.

“Uuuuuwwwaaaaa, Monmon is scarrrryyyyy.” While she was saying shakily, Katie quickly handed over a package to him.

“Umm... I'm not sure whether it fits your taste or not, but I baked these biscuits myself. Please try them.”

“Biscuit?”

A gently and softly luscious smell from the bag was hanging in the air.

Apparently delicious, involuntarily he extended his hand... and a small hand stretched out from beside him.

That hand tore up that bag, and removed the biscuits from the inside.

Gnash...

Aumaumaumaum...

He timidly looked beside him, and saw Louise's face which was as if the biscuits were extremely awful.

“Wh-What are you doing?”

“What is this? It tastes awful.”

“I tried so hard in making them!”

“Don't give pet feeds to other people's pet dog.”

“What 'pet dog'!? Saito-sama is a hero!”

“Hero? Who?”

Without thinking, Saito puffed up his chest.

“I am!”

The next moment, Louise's knee struck his stomach, and Saito tumbled to the ground. Louise placed her feet firmly on Saito's face. In a completely typical style, Louise yelled.

“You had merely stopped the 70,000, what are you so proud of? It's just like stopping a farmer's cattle. What's so great about it!?”

Next, Louise trampled Saito's groin, delivering the finishing blow. *Oouucchhh!* Saito groaned, and became silent.

Everyone at that place thought that Louise was great. She had referred to the 70,000 military troops as farmer's cattle. The female students were frightened of such a person with unusual strength, and running away, dispersed.

Louise seized Saito who had fainted in agony by the legs, and dragged him along.

Meanwhile Montmorency took Guiche, whose limbs were locked together by ice loops and was floating in mid-air, away.

With the Commanding Officer and Assistant Commanding Officer absent, the assembled male trainees exchanged troubled glances. Malicorne let out a sigh, and said,

“Wouldn't it be great if Louise and Montmorency become our Commanding Officers?”

The male trainees nodded their heads unanimously.

In the room, Louise who had been dragging him all along, *thump!*, chucked him onto the bed.

Saito came to, and shouted angrily at Louise.

“What the hell are you doing?”

Louise's cheeks puffed, and she folded her arms.

“There's no problem being enthusiastic about it. I thought it's good for you to let you do as you please, but...”

“But what?”

Louise became silent.

“What's the problem?”

At his inquiry, *huhh...* Louise let off a weak sigh, and slipped into her bed.

“...Damn. You just carry on with your busy life.”

Saito was hit by those words. Evidently, because he was too busy lately and did not care about Louise, she was sulking now.

That was inevitable. His recent self was somehow full with fervor.

New position, new events which he had not experienced before...

Such things made his heart beat in excitement. Naturally, the time he spent with Louise decreased as well; nothing could be done about that.

Besides, those guys who attacked us the other day...

“Those guys who attacked us before this... it would be troublesome if they strike again right? Isn't it good to have more allies now?”

Well, that's true, but... Louise pursed her lips.

“But during the other time, you managed to win by your own.”

“That could not be told at all!”

Saito bellowed angrily, but Louise was more displeased with his not spending more time with her than that incident.

“Which means that you can't spend time with your master, eh?”

Louise kicked her legs around under the blanket, and complained.

“Why the displeased look?”

“Nothing... but that means that I don't have to call you master now.”

“Why!?”

“Well, I'm a noble now right!? We are equal now right!”

“Haaah? What the heck are you talking about!? I've said it already! Don't confuse a mere 'Chevalier' with the Duke of La Vallière's position! We've only risen from the status of a human with a dog to a human with a MONKEY! That's all! Don't get the wrong idea!”

Louise combed her hair up and declared.

“Ah, I see...” Saito was further unamused.

And he had been thinking for a while that he could be equal to Louise. Looks like that wasn't the case at all.

Saito became quiet, and looking bored, Louise crawled into her bed... and pulled the blanket over her head.

Louise was not seriously thinking that they were "not equal". In other words, she did not care about the difference in their social status. Saito is Saito. That's all that matters.

It was simply that she did not know her feelings, and felt that Saito who was engrossed in the knight corps was a little unforgivable; at which she unintentionally insulted the Chevalier title.

At Saito's silence, Louise poked her head out from under the blanket.

“...”

Like a rabbit, the face which was peeking out from the hole stared at Saito, after which it slipped back in again.

“Think about what you should do to improve your master's mood.”

“Although you say that.”

Seemingly troubled, Saito scratched his head. From the bed, Louise extended her hand, with a finger pointing up.

“Hug me tightly? A-And whisper at my ears 'I would like to serve you.'...or something like that.”

What do you mean by “Hug me tightly”!? Saito was a little angry inside.

So you want to tie me down using that bait...? He was thinking that, but not unwillingly, he still hugged Louise from on top of the blanket.

Under the blanket, Louise became quiet like a cat.

Louise... unconsciously relaxed her face.

No... Being hugged by a boy one likes somehow feels good. Although it is from the top of a blanket.

If possible, I want it like this all the time. But I cannot permit that. Aah, but what should I do if he requests that? If I allow him once, will he really be unfaithful as Montmorency said? What should I do? As she was thinking about that... Saito opened his mouth.

“Hey Louise.”

“Wh-What...?”

“Is that enough?”

“Heh?”

In the blanket, Louise squinted her eyes.

“How do I say it? Everyone is waiting for me since I am an Assistant Commanding Officer... if I skip practice, how could I discipline them?”

Leaving those words behind, Saito left the bed immediately, and went out of the room.

Left behind, Louise was in a daze for a little while, and she shook...

She sprang up from the bed swiftly, and started kicking the wall.

“What was that!? What does he mean! All my pride is shattered now!”

After kicking the wall for a while, Louise muttered while panting.

“You just wait and see... When I am serious... Be it a maid or an elf... All of them will wag their tails and run away!”

The next day...

After school, Saito went to the kitchen to greet those over there.

He remembered that he had not seen Siesta's face for a while. He ought to inform her about his becoming a noble properly in person.

Siesta's figure could not be seen. Saito asked her boss, Marteau, who was tasting a stew.

“Do you know where Siesta is?”

At his question, Marteau glared fiercely at Saito.

“I won't tell someone who has been wagging his tail at nobles.”

He declared. As if having the same opinion as their master, the other cooks who once praised Saito so much, were now watching him with cold eyes.

Compared to the times when he was insulted by the students, Saito was many times sadder now.

Being told such words by such kind people, Saito gradually broke out in tears. Subsequently, Head Chef Marteau panicked.

“Oi oi! You had taken all the trouble to become a noble, and now you're crying?”

“But... you all were so kind to me... and you had changed... but I didn't change at all...”

“Don't cry! Geez, for God's sake, why on earth did you want to become a noble!?”

Saito bit his lips.

“I don't know how to put it properly, but... somehow I wanted it. Hey uncle, you can touch people's hearts through your cooking. So you became a chef, and this is somewhere you would be. Am I wrong?”

“Hmm, well... now that you say that, maybe that's true.”

“I'm like that as well. I want a place I belong to, a place where I can have a go at the things I can do. I believe that my position as a noble would make it easier for me to do so. It doesn't mean that I specially wanted to become a noble. If that place is near the thing I want to do... I would use that place conversely, I think.”

At his words, Head Chef Marteau shrugged.

“I don't have much knowledge. You tell me difficult things, but I don't get it. Just that, didn't you become haughty...?”

Seemingly embarrassed, Head Chef Marteau muttered.

“Haughty? I don't have any such intention at all!! Please treat me the same way as before! If you think I'm unreasonable and detest me, then don't say anything.”

Head Chef Marteau snorted. After that, he promptly hugged Saito.

“S-Sorry... To tell you the truth, I am jealous of you... To become a noble from a commoner, that is as hard as a human becoming God! But hearing your words, I am now relieved. You are you. Right? 'Our Sword'!”

“Although I don't really understand, I am glad to become your sword, as always!”

Guriguri, Head Chef Marteau stroked Saito's head.

“Tell Siesta the same thing! That girl is feeling really down now...”

At that instant,

Bang!, The kitchen door was opened hard. *Thump thump thump* Siesta rushed in.

“Waaaah waaaaah! This is bad! Waaah, waaah!”

It was a somewhat huge pandemonium.

“What's wrong?”

Head Chef Marteau asked.

“I! I have been transferred! Aargh!”

“Transferred?”

Saito and Head Chef Marteau exchanged glances. Then Siesta noticed Saito's presence and blushed furiously.

“Saito-san...I, I...”

Filled with emotion, Siesta murmured.

“Wh-What on earth... aren't you feeling really down now?”

“You're right. I am a bit down. Because Saito-san had become a noble. I thought after you became a noble, you would forget about me.”

“I won't forget!”

“But it's alright now.”

“What the heck is going on!?”

Head Chef Marteau asked as Siesta lowered her head.

“Thank you very much for taking good care of me so far.”

“Haaaah?”

Siesta showed a paper she was holding to the blank Head Chef.

“Isn't this the signature of the Queen?”

Sure enough, that was an official document on which Henrietta's name was written. Underneath it, there was Old Osman's signature as well.

“What, what? "Arrange a servant from within the academy to serve Mr. Saito Chevalier de Hiraga". What is this?”

“This morning, this letter from the Royal Palace arrived at Osman-sama's. After that, he ordered the head of maids to choose someone. But the head of maids chose me. To wait on him, someone who's close to him would be better, which is me.”

Not understanding why it happened, Saito became nervous, and Siesta quickly bowed her head.

“Because of that, please treat me well.”

Meanwhile, Louise... was trying to carry out the strategy which she had been scheming secretly for the past two days.

“Until now, the way to do things is wrong.”

“How is it wrong?”

The one asking Louise, who was murmuring continually, was Derflinger. As usual, Louise had appointed the intelligent sword as her fellow staff in her operation plans.

“How should I say it? I had been trying to win at places outside my field. Be it a black cat appearance, or a maid-like appearance...anyway, these are not things nobles do.”

“That's possible.”

“For the time being, while satisfying my pride, I should go back to basics.”

Louise exaggerated. The clothes she was wearing were... that legendary “sailor uniform.” Some time ago, she had bowed her head low and borrowed it from Montmorency. It was a present Guiche gave her after he had received it from Saito. It was tailored to fit the lean body of Montmorency, but somehow it fitted Louise as well. Obviously there was a lot of space left in front of her breasts, and the clothes were too long as well... but Louise held it together using pins.

“Basics?”

“Yes. It's useless parading in weird stuff. The ears of the cat were overdone. Anyway, after confirming that your ideas are out of the question, I will win by using my own thoughts and my inspirations. That is what a real noble would do.”

Louise folded her arms, and peered into the mirror, satisfied.

With her body wearing the baggy sailor uniform, Louise turned around the spot. Her pink hair, scarf, and the pleated skirt of her uniform flew up simultaneously.

“Aren't you imitating that maid?”

“Shut up. Between the maid and I, our power varies a lot!”

“Aren't you the weaker one? It looks a little saggy on you...”

Inhaling a deep breath, Louise reached out for the wand on top of the small desk beside her. Derflinger's attitude changed completely.

“Nope, stronger.”

“Obviously!”

With a triumphant face, Louise posed before the mirror.

Holding the hem of her skirt up, Louise put her little finger into her mouth. At her look, Derflinger put in.

“Anyway, if you really like partner that much.....why don't you try being more frank? Don't beat around the bush, and just say something like what you said before, 'do the same to me', and it will just work, won't it? He'll just surrender and give in immediately.”

“NO!”

“Why is that so?”

“Well... if I do that, won't he get carried away? It is not like the other time. As I said, he groped those breasts, so I put him down. He is unforgivable.”

“You're not honest.”

“Or perhaps I should say.”

Louise gripped the sword, and peered into the hilt part with a scary face.

“I did not like him specially.”

“Yes.”

With a voice of complete disbelief, Derflinger muttered.

After that, *Haaaaaa...*, let off a deep sigh.

“What's the matter?”

“I am still cute after all. This is, another sin.”

“...My dear, you are really calm huh.”

“After seeing such a tidy and cute me, that insect would have to fall on his knees.”

“Really?”

“Fufu. Fufufufufufu.”

“Sorry, I'm scared.”

“He will surely feel like this eh?”

Carried away, Louise crawled at the bed. Under Derflinger's amazed scrutiny, Louise's favorite monodrama of late began.

“Louise~~~ Louise~~~ You are so cute... Your appearance is better than the time you wore maid clothes~~~ I had fallen madly in love with Louise~~~!”

After that, Louise stood up quickly.

“Hmph! Isn't this obvious! Now you notice my charm? Aah, I can't do anything about it!”

Again, Louise knelt at the floor.

“I'm sorry~~~ Sorry for ignoring you~~~ I got carried away after becoming a noble, sorry for that~~~ Sorry for engrossing in the knight thingy~~~ Sorry for looking for at the maid~~~ Sorry for groping that half-elf's ridiculous breasts~~~!”

Louise stood straight.

“If you want to apologize, you know how to treat me right?”

Flat on the ground, Louise licked dust.

“Yes! I am a humble dog... Louise-sama's vile pet dog... I would do anything... Please let me stay by your side...”

Standing up, Louise folded her arms. She was carried away excitedly, as if her familiar was just right there. With a smile full of bizarrely swelling excitement an a victory boast, she looked down on the imaginary familiar.

“If you understand, li-lili-lick my sh-shsh-shoes.”

“Yeeess! I will lick it! This Saito-dog will lick it!”

Louise cringed down and lowered her head.

“Hey lady.”

“What!? Now's the climax! Don't disturb! It's really exciting after this!”

“The door is...”

“What's with the door!? What happened to the door!”

Louise turned around. With eyes as if they were looking at a miserable creature, Siesta and Saito who were present there were staring at her. Louise's face paled.

Siesta rushed over to Louise, and held those hands.

“Let's go to a place with free medical treatment, okay? You're affected from the warm spell of spring huh... It's all right. You'll be healed quickly.”

Saito approached her, and peered into Louise's face.

“Say honestly. What did you eat?”

Strongly, Louise shook both of them off, and went to the window. From there, she tried to jump down.

“Wa-Wait!”

“Louise! Oi! This is the third floor!”

Siesta and Saito ran after her. Louise yelled frantically.

“Leave me! Please, leave me alone!”

After they managed to calm Louise down, two hours had already passed.

With her face fuming, Louise glared at Saito and Siesta. Both of them drooped their heads. To hide her embarrassment at their seeing THAT, Louise muttered with a sullen face.

“Why did you bring her back?”

“Please take care of me!”

Beaming, Siesta bowed down at Louise.

“If you come here to wait on me, there is no need for me.”

Gazing at Siesta who was looking at her, Louise declared.

“That... Despite your words, I did not come to take care of Miss Vallière. I came to take care of Saito-san.”

“He can take care of himself.”

“It is the personal command of Her Majesty The Queen.”

“The Princess did!?”

Louise shouted wildly.

“Yes. Please look at this.”

Siesta showed the official documents from Queen Henrietta which had been going around, to Louise.

“...That's true, huh. A servant for Mr. Saito Chevalier de Hiraga.”

“Although it's me, I would still not come here to intrude.”

“I don't know,” Louise shook her head.

“What about it?”

Louise glared at Saito.

“Eh? Me?”

“Yes. You want to be with Siesta, right? What about it?”

With a jerk, Louise glared at Saito. Looking troubled, Saito scratched his nose.

“Lately, I became busy... honestly, I can't clean the room...”

Upon a closer look, one could see a layer of dust had settled in the room. Previously, Saito was the one who cleaned the room. But since the formation of the knight corps, he had no time to clean it.

“I would do anything!”

“Is that okay? I have a bad feeling about this...”

“To take care of Saito-san is my happiness.”

Siesta smiled pleasantly.

Oh no, Louise thought. *Wh-What noble words.* As usual, Saito's face reddened a bit.

For guys, there aren't any words which would make them happier than this. And Siesta had declared those words.

Because of the grave situation, Louise counterattacked from another angle.

“Well, since you're unwilling to give in... it's bad, but never mind... Where are you going to sleep? There's only one bed.”

“Isn't it okay for us to sleep together? Because the bed is big enough.”

“No! No! Noooooo! It's too small! Besides, isn't Siesta...”

A commoner; as Louise was about to say this, she swallowed her words. She remembered her debt of gratitude towards Siesta. And now, she could not bring herself to treat commoners with disdain.

But still sleeping together is an absolute NO. Louise did not know what this Siesta would do to Saito when she was sleeping.

“Well then, okay. I will sleep in my straw again. It should be okay for you two to sleep together.”

Saito said dryly again.

“Heh?”

In a daze, Siesta shook her head.

“The idea! Saito-san is now a knight! You MUST sleep in a bed! Well, I'll accompany you!”

“...Heee?”

Saito's face reddened all the more. Louise was trembling all over. And finally, she said those words which she did not want to say.

“O-Okay. No pr-problem. Let's sleep together.”

“...But, sleeping together with nobles...”

“Saito is now a noble as well.”

“But, Saito-san is Saito-san...”

Siesta shifted uneasily.

With a stiff smile, Louise said.

“That's okay.”

“All right...”

Apparently embarrassed, Siesta hung her head in shame.

After that- “Well then, first of all, cleaning!” -Siesta started cleaning the room, apparently enjoying it.

“Let me help,” Saito suggested, and started helping Siesta's cleaning. For a while, Louise fixed her eyes on the two who were cleaning the room, seemingly enjoying it... Eventually, she felt somewhat unable to stay there any more.

“I'll do it as well.”

Siesta and Saito opened their eyes wide.

“What? Is it funny for me to clean up?”

“Yeah, because this has never happened even once before.”

Louise snatched the dustcloth from Siesta's hand, and started polishing the bed. Yet, no matter what, she was inept at it. Because she had crumpled the dustcloth into a clump and did it like that, it did not become cleaner at all. Finding it hard to continue looking at her- “This is the way to do it.”- Siesta explained to Louise.

After a few hours, looking at the sparklingly clean room, Siesta said joyfully.

“We had made it clean!”

“Yeah,” Louise nodded. Looking at that clean room, somehow her anger subsided...*Huh, well, forget it...* She felt like this.

During that night.

The three of them slept “like the character for river[1]. Saito was in the middle, with Louise at his right and Siesta at his left.

Louise felt rather embarrassed at sleeping like she did on other days, which was to lay her head on Saito's chest. So she separated herself a little from him, with

her back facing him. Siesta had the same feelings, or else she was thoughtful; but she slept apart from Saito as well. Initially, Louise could not sleep, and kept an eye out on the two of them. If they did anything strange, she planned to jump up and whack Saito.

Nevertheless, Siesta and Saito were perfectly still. Not used to cleaning, Louise slowly fell asleep.

Saito really was Saito, stiffening just like that. At any rate, beside him were Louise and Siesta who were sleeping. With two sleeping girls beside him, he did not have any fantasies at all.

...This isn't really a good thing.

Saito thought. Because he was too nervous, he did not even feel a tinge of sweetness. Or perhaps, stuck between the silent pressures from the feelings of animosity, anger, and not knowing what to do, which were not visible to Louise and Siesta, he was about to be flattened.

But...now isn't the time to worry over these girls.

Louise had said that as "That is a reward..."

I am loved completely by her, but if I have any feelings left for other girls, I can't do anything weird to Siesta...

His mind became more and more troubled.

First of all, I have to forget the girls' affairs.

Somehow or another, right now the organization of the knight corps is the most important, so...

I have to focus completely on doing a man's job, so...

Saito drove Louise and Siesta out of his head... and thought.

In this world, what can I do?

I don't know.

Even if I devote myself to training, as I thought, the answer did not appear.

Oh well... it has just begun. Just understanding little by little will be good enough.

Displaying his optimistic characteristic, Saito closed his eyes.

Teacher, I will do my best...

He whispered softly.

Worn out by the noon's training, Saito slowly went into the dream world.

After she dozed off for a while, Louise suddenly opened her eyes. She was sleeping lightly.

She had an unpleasant premonition, and she looked towards Saito... and without her knowing it, *hadn't Siesta been using Saito's upper arm as a pillow? But until just now, she was still apart from him!* Louise ground her teeth.

Fuuunn, and she placed her head on Saito's left arm. After that... Siesta's head moved, and this time, assumed a part of Saito's shoulder as her pillow.

Louise clenched her fist, and just like her, placed her head on his left shoulder. Siesta's head moved all the more, and finally reached his chest.

“...You are already awake, right?”

“Mmmpphh...”

Siesta's face blushed a bit, and snored unnaturally. As if she wanted to say “That's my place!”, Louise placed her head further up Saito's chest.

Siesta's eyes opened slowly.

Between Saito's chest, both of them glared at each other.

“Leave.”

When Louise said that, Siesta counterattacked.

“If Saito-san says that, only then will I leave.”

“Because he's sleeping, I'll give the command. Leave.”

“No.”

“You surrendered at Albion right? You backed out.”

“Wrong. That was merely because I pitied Miss Vallière.”

Louise trembled for a while. *Huuuuuu...*, she took in a deep breath, and gently pressed her lips against the sleeping Saito's.

“Eh?”

“Mmmph...”

And then, she inserted her tongue flamboyantly.

“Mmph, mmpppphhhh, mmm...”

Dumbfounded, Siesta looked at them. Or perhaps, at the terrible intensity of Louise. Much greater than kiss, it was like the force of stabbing with a knife.

After turning her tongue around in Saito's mouth forcefully, Louise's lips left, and declared to Siesta.

“We are not really lovers. But, he is my property. It's awful for you to interfere between us,"

Louise stated, with a heavily implied killing intent in her voice.

For a while, Siesta was overwhelmed by Louise's force... but eventually regained herself. Facing Louise's glare straight on, she grasped Saito's right hand.

And before Louise could even stop her, Siesta inserted his hand into the gap between her nightclothes. Grandly, she held his hand in her cleavage, making Louise feel suffocated.

“Mmmphh, mmmmmm...!”

“Until now, I knew nothing at all about how to attract boys.”

“...Liar!”

“It's true. But the girl who could not stand looking at such a me... taught me various things. Various things.”

“I-I see. Because of that you let him touch your breasts? And you said you knew nothing at all?”

Louise asked, her face twitching.

“Different from Miss Vallière, I can't go on just waiting. Please treat me well.”

“Take care... Well, I'll try to do my best. But, I still think that's useless. This guy has fallen madly in love with me!”

Louise exclaimed triumphantly.

“Ah... He must have been confused by that noble ambiance.”

“That's not true at all!”

“If that's the case, he likes every part of you?”

Louise fell silent. She was not sure about that.

Siesta peered into Louise's face and said.

“So how about this? In the coming Sleipnir Ball, if Saito-san can find Miss

Vallière... I'll admit that Saito-san really likes Miss Vallière. When he does that, I will truly give up.”

“Isn't this interesting?”

Blowing her top, Louise accepted that proposal.

“You won't regret? On the other hand, if he does not find you...”

Saito was unaware of the girls' fight which was unfolding on top of his chest...

At this time, Saito, who was possibly the most fortunate and unfortunate man in Halkeginia, was having an ironic nightmare consisting of him being wooed by both Guiche and Malicorne in the midst of the training of the knight corps.

On top of Saito's right arm, Siesta started to snore. After scowling at her face... Louise let off a sigh.

Is Siesta right about Saito being only attracted to me because of my noble ambiance? Her self-confidence was increasingly swaying.

And he was so near to her... but she did not know his feelings at all. This thing had made Louise really uneasy.

At the same time, a question arose in her mind.

It was about Henrietta.

No matter how great Saito's achievement was, it is impossible for a queen herself to assign a personal maid to him.

That is too kind.

What on earth is Henrietta's motive?

Don't tell me that she intends to assign another dangerous task to him?

If Henrietta is going to visit this time..., Louise fell asleep.

Chapter Six: The Feelings of The Queen

As time flowed on, winter passed and spring came along.

Tristain was embracing the warm season.

Was it because of the reaction of the end of the war which had prolonged for 8 months? Be it in the streets or the Royal Palace, a somewhat gentle atmosphere was hanging in the air. The sentinels who were standing guard at the gate of the Royal Palace unintentionally yawned. The officers who should find fault with them were also gazing absent-mindedly at the sky, showing relieved expressions.

People walking down the streets brimmed with liveliness. Although Tarbes had burned down completely, most of the territory of Tristain was not involved in the war. The atmosphere due to the war was improving, various things started to overflow into the streets. As if to enjoy the transient festivity, merchants in the streets shouted at the top of their voice, and all the customers fished for and bought goods from Albion or other imported items.

On Bourdonné Street, which was crowded with people walking about, a pure white carriage sped past.

Flanked by two black coaches, one in front and one behind, and with a grand procession of knights making its way, the crowd knew that it had to be a majestic, high-class gentleman or lady.

Recognizing the lily crest across the coachman seat of the carriage, the citizens of Tristain rejoiced loudly.

“Her Majesty The Queen! Long live Her Majesty The Queen!”

It was the carriage of the queen of Tristain, Henrietta.

She was just returning from a luncheon with the King of Germania in a frontier city.

In the carriage, Henrietta opened a small window, and waved to the people outside. Having won the war, Henrietta was the popular focus of the citizens right now. The selfish citizens who complained about Henrietta's heavy taxation during the war began supporting her once again after their lives started becoming more comfortable due to the tax cut accompanying the end of the war.

“Long live Queen Henrietta of Honorable Poverty[2]!”

One person in the crowd shouted, and that cheer spread all over in a flash.

“Long live Queen Henrietta of Honorable Poverty! Long live Tristain!”

After being called "Queen of Honorable Poverty" repeatedly, Henrietta's face darkened a little. For the sake of easing the poverty of the country, she had abandoned all the personal belongings of the royal family- this move had made Henrietta even more famous. Henrietta hated to announce that to the people... but Mazarin who had heard this from the finance minister had spread the report out without hesitating.

Her face left the window... The curtains were closed, and Henrietta mumbled to Mazarin beside her,

“Isn't this just like... a cheap play sold to flatter the people?”

“Is this not good? No one is going to lose from it, after all.”

Mazarin said with a composed face.

“I do not want to use such things to garner popularity,”

Henrietta muttered with ladylike fastidiousness. But she did not say it out loud, her lips merely mouthed the words.

“I have been saying this all the while.”

“*Using whatever things which can be used is the basis of politics*, right? Do you still remember it?”

“If that's the case, fine.”

Henrietta closed her eyes. *Even my kind heart had to be used as a tool to rule over the people... This world I plunged into, what a foul place it is.*

Despite the fact that the war had ended, Henrietta didn't have any leisure time because of it. Instead, at the moment, international relations were flourishing compared to the former days; she was pursued by more affairs than even during war time.

Uu... Henrietta lightly clasped her mouth. Apparently worried, Mazarin looked into her face.

“Your Majesty, what's wrong?”

“No... I feel a little...”

“Should I summon the Water healers?”

Mazarin asked with a seemingly anxious face. Henrietta shook her head.

“I'm fine. Sorry for making you worried.”

Her heart gradually could not stand all the affairs and the pressure, and started shrieking. *I want to take a break somewhere*, even if she thought that, living as a queen, that could not be done.

During the war, she was sustained by the word "revenge." But it had ended... and what left was a large hole in her schedule, but stress was simply stress, and couldn't be used to fill in that large hole of hers.

At any rate, Henrietta was completely exhausted.

The townspeople's cheer towards a certain person continuously flew into the ears of the queen. By merely hearing that name, the gloom inside her heart cleared... Henrietta's cheeks lightly colored.

Ondine • Knight Corps of the Water Spirit which was being led by Guiche and Saito was also given the duty of escorting the return journey of the queen from the luncheon.

Although it was an "escort," it contained a substantially formal factor. In short, it was the debut of the newly established knight corps.

They rendezvoused with Henrietta's troop at the gate of Tristania, according to the plan they developed some time ago, and marched to the palace together.

In accordance with the hierarchy of the Royal Palace, that array of troops was at the end of the queen's troupe, but the group members were full of vigor.

At the head of the line was Guiche, the commanding officer. Saito's horse followed behind, keeping a distance the length of a horse's head.

“Ah... But this is... huh...”

Lining at both sides of the road, Saito looked at the figures of the citizens, whispering. A chevalier's crest... Clad in the dazzling mantle on which a silver embroidery was sewn, with his features, Saito appeared to be an extremely weird existence. The people at the street stared intently at Saito who was carrying a sword at his shoulder instead of a wand and for some reason, spreading rumors sneakily together.

Beside him, Guiche turned towards Saito.

“What's the matter, Assistant Commanding Officer?”

“None of your business,”

Saito muttered, blushing. Changing suddenly from when they practiced, in this kind of place where everyone's attention was focused on them, Guiche became less reserved. An exhibition of his flamboyant character.

“Just like this. Look!”

Saying that, Guiche waved his rose. The dancing, falling petals fluttered in the air, drifting about... Afterwards, they transformed into doves. Rustling, the doves flew about in the air.

Cheers spread forth from the spectators along the street.

Triumphant, Guiche raised his head high, at which one of the onlookers shouted,

“Isn't that gentleman the fourth son of the Gramont household, Guiche-sama?”

At which someone "uhuh-ed" in approval.

“That's right! I heard that he took down a city and got promoted as the commanding officer of the knight corps as a reward!”

Cheers rose from everywhere, subsequently Guiche's name was called out repeatedly.

“Long live the Gramont family, Long live Guiche!”

At those cheers, Guiche waved his hand at them. And for this, he had specially prepared sakura flowers.

But... after all, the scattering golden flowers which had acquired cheers, at the next moment, was replaced by something else. All the eyes focused at Saito beside Guiche, who was carrying a sword at his back.

“Who is that guy? Isn't he carrying a sword at his back? A commoner?”

“A normal commoner like that, why is he mingling with the knight corps?”

Gossips started to fly about everywhere.

Eventually, an audacious feminine voice could be heard.

“What nonsense are you talking about! Everyone! Isn't that boy SAITO-KUN! Because he held back the army of seventy thousand alone, the allies were saved!”

It was Scarron. Swaggering, he looked towards Saito and waved at him. At one look, Jessica and the other girls of the "Charming Fairies" Inn were beside him, in a line. Scarron who was running a bar business had probably heard this rumor from the officers who went to his bar for a drink. Or maybe it was Siesta who had told him.

Anyway, at Scarron's words, the stir in the midst of the onlookers subsided.

Almost all the people knew about the evacuating allied forces and how they got rescued by Gallia's army which had suddenly participated in the war. And the fact that before Gallia's participation, someone stopped the onslaught of the 70,000 strong army which was like a raging billow...

Which unit of soldiers had stopped them? Or was it some mage soldiers who participated in secret? Or was it the reluctant bodyguards of Germania? Or was it really a knight who had stopped them, and who was really an elf? The rumors went on. All kinds of rumors flew about.

But how could this youth accomplish any of that...?

Sniggers escaped from among the onlookers.

“But, for a swordsman to become a knight... he must have achieved quite some feat!”

At that voice, the laughter lessened. Upon which, noisy and boastful arguments rose.

“Impossible! No matter how you think of it, he is just a commoner. He could not have done such a great thing!”

“Recently Agnes-sama who had become the commanding officer of the musketeer squad, wasn't she of a commoner's origin!”

At the townspeople's dispute, the owner of the white carriage decided to settle it.

A soldier who was waiting on the queen went near the window, and looked like he received a message... He rushed over to Saito, whispering something, two words, three words, and Saito who was in the maelstrom nodded.

He approached the white carriage with a tensed look.

As the attention of the onlookers and the escorting guards focused on it, from the window, a white and graceful hand held out. It was Queen Henrietta's hand.

Saito took that hand, and awkwardly kissed it.

A commotion rose from the onlookers.

As expected, that hearsay was really correct. If he did not achieve something like that deed, it was impossible for the queen to allow a guard from amidst the commoners to kiss her hand.

The onlookers' started shouting repeating,

“Long live Chevalier Saito!”

Receiving the cheering voices from the townspeople, Saito displayed a bewildered look. After returning to the rank of troops, Guiche whispered into Saito's ear,

“Hey, hey! Everyone is praising you right? You have to live up to their expectations!”

Nervously, Saito waved his hand.

At which the shouts of joy became louder still.

“I give up... If this is the case, I won't even step out to the streets.”

“Whhhaaat? The people would be weary of this soon. Tomorrow, they may somehow forget about you,”

Guiche whispered, as if he understood.

After closing the window, Henrietta stared at the back of her hand that she had allowed Saito to kiss just now, and heaved a depressed sigh. She then turned to look at Mazarin beside her. Maybe riding in the carriage was too tiring, as he started nodding off to sleep. Henrietta's teacher was not young anymore. Henrietta stretched out her hands to adjust the round hat of the aging prime minister.

I have to be more firm. Firmer, firmer.

Her heart was suffering from this heavy pressure again... Gazing at the back of her hand, her faint courage sprung up.

They arrived at the palace, and except for one part which was on duty, the rest of the escorting knight corps dispersed. Unconsciously, she searched for the Ondine with her eyes.

The Imperial Guard corps which had been established by Henrietta not long ago was having a friendly chat at a corner of the palace. Having just completed their debut, they were going to return to the Academy after that. Because they were required to undergo a year's training period before taking up any formal duty in the Royal Palace, they were not going to linger in the palace.

Among the knight corps, she discovered the black hair of Saito, whom she permitted a kiss at her hand. Even though she had the sudden urge to go to his side, Henrietta changed her mind.

Cabinet ministers and servants welcomed Henrietta who had arrived.

Without losing the dignity of a queen, she displayed a smiling face, and thanked their efforts.

Henrietta walked alongside her ministers down the corridor, while telling them her decision for each matter. Even as she was walking, work befell on her continuously. That was because Henrietta must fulfill her duties as the Queen.

As they were walking, one of the court ladies approached her.

“A visitor is waiting.”

“Visitor? Any visitor, no, be it an emperor or the Pope, invite them to the waiting room.”

The court lady whispered something in Henrietta's ears. Hearing that name, Henrietta displayed a smile of relief.

When Henrietta saw the person who was waiting in the living room, Henrietta's face brightened up suddenly. A smile which was rarely seen lately was displayed, and Henrietta tightly embraced the visitor who was waiting for her

since some time ago.

“Aah, Louise! Louise! You should come once in a while to show me your face!”

“I want to do that very much as well. But the Princess is busy, I think...”

“If it's you, I grant you the privilege to come to this room at any time you want, Louise. Isn't that natural? You are my friend.”

Louise surveyed the room which had nothing.

“Everything here has really been sold, huh?”

She said in a lonesome voice.

“Yeah, that's right. For the duties of a queen, a place to sleep and a desk are enough.”

She said that, but the bed was left behind because of the Finance Minister's insistence that “he would oppose her sleeping on the floor, as expected.”

Louise realized the absence of the glittering "Ruby of Wind" on Henrietta's finger, and her eyes bulged.

“Princess, what happened to the Ruby of Wind?”

“Ah, I sold it.”

“What!”

“Because when I look at it, I recall things... Because of the feelings in the ring, I was spurred to go into a war. Consequently, now that the war has ended, I released...”

“What do you mean!?”

Louise let out a shocked voice.

“What's the matter? Louise.”

“That ring is... a ring necessary for the 'Bearer of Void.'”

“What do you mean?”

“Once I insert the ring, I become able to read the Founder's Prayer Book.”

“Aren't you the only one who could do that?”

While saying those words, Henrietta paled.

“Recently, didn't you receive a notice? At Albion, we were attacked by a 'familiar of Void,' and we met another 'Bearer of Void.' There is a possibility that other 'Bearers of Void' exist. And that person is unlikely to have a pure heart. If the ring falls into the hands of those who have a reason to use the power of Void...”

Henrietta was distraught.

“Aa, what should I do! If it's me!”

“Do you know who you gave it to?”

The one to which it was given to was Finance Minister De Muri. Henrietta quickly summoned him.

“Did you call me, Your Majesty?”

It seemed that he sensed something unusual about Henrietta's expression. It was an anxious voice.

“Finance Minister, the ring I gave to you...”

The Finance Minister grinned.

“Is it that ring? The memento of the Albion royal family, 'Ruby of Wind?'”

“That's it! The one I commanded you to sell, the 'Ruby of Wind' I handed to you. Do you remember who you sold it to?”

The Finance Minister produced a small box from his breast pocket.

“Is it this?”

The thing which appeared from the small box was the Ruby of Wind, as expected.

“When Your Majesty handed this to me, Your Majesty's face was not normal. Because of that, I held onto it. At any rate, I wanted to return this to your majesty for some time.”

“...Aah, you are a splendid person, Minister De Muri.”

“No... Because it is something filled with memories, I will never sell such a valuable thing. This is just like a part of the body.”

Leaving those words, the Finance Minister withdrew.

Henrietta gazed at the Ruby of Wind which had returned to her hand once again. From those eyes, a tear drop trailed down her cheek. This tear seemed to come suddenly of its own accord, Henrietta still had a dazed expression.

After realizing that she was overflowing with tears, Henrietta hid her face with both her hands.

“What am I... Only after my tears fell did I realize that I was relieved.”

Louise's face became serious, and placed her hand at Henrietta's shoulder.

“Princess-sama, you are getting tired. Why don't you take a day off and rest?”

“Thank you. The one who would call me to 'rest' is only you. But, I cannot do that. If I were to rest for a day, it is just as if some part of the country has stopped.”

Henrietta said, while patting Louise's hair.

“You make me envious, Louise.”

"What is your majesty talking about? Princess-sama, don't you have everything that I don't?"

"I believe that ..... actually not having anything is much more blissful than having everything. That's what I really feel, when I look at this ring."

Henrietta gazed at the 'Wind Ruby' in her hand and said. For a short while, she gazed at it...

“I haven't listened to the reason you came here for.”

Louise looked hesitatingly as if it became difficult for her to speak, before displaying a resolute expression.

“Um... It's about Saito.”

Henrietta, who was taken aback for a moment, returned to normal immediately.

“Even today, I have borrowed him. He is good and hardworking. A magnificent, gallant man. Aah, I should offer him an expression of gratitude...”

“It is about that gratitude. To receive Saito alone, sending the Varsenda vessel; conferring the rank of 'Chevalier'... giving the instructions for a servant for him, and allowing him to kiss your hand in the middle of the city...”

“....”

“Although this might not be appropriate... as a treatment to a mere chevalier, this is too kind. Your majesty treating him like that, do you have any other ulterior motives? This is what I am suspicious of.”

“...For example?”

“Using him for some dangerous duties...”

Dumbfounded, Henrietta stared at Louise.

“I? Using him for dangerous duties!? Never! How could I do such a thing! He is your valuable familiar right? Even if he becomes a noble, that would not change. The valuable person of you who is valuable to me, there's no way I would make him do dangerous things.”

“If that's the case, then it's fine, but...”

Henrietta hugged Louise tightly.

“As I thought, you are a gentle child, right? Same as during those days. He is... a

great person, to me and the country... Yeah, he had displayed unparalleled loyalty. As a queen, I should reward this loyalty.”

“...But, Saito is someone from a different world. Someone who has to leave here sooner or later. Is it a good thing granting such an important task to such a person?”

“...That is something he had decided, Louise. To me, he is a necessary... errr, oh yeah, a necessary person. Because of that, I had done what I could. Even if he had accepted them, he has the freedom to repudiate them. When he was conferred the title of a knight, I had already said that.”

Louise nodded. During the ceremony in which Saito was conferred the title of a knight, he didn't swear allegiance to Henrietta and the mother country. So to speak, he was a free knight... if those words were the case... At any rate, Saito was not an ordinary knight.

Anyway, if he won't be going through anything dangerous, she had no objections any more. Louise bowed her head quickly, and withdrew.

“Aren't you returning together with Saito-dono? Now, he might possibly still be in the courtyard.”

Louise shook her head.

“No... because I didn't tell him that I was coming. So, I return alone as well.”

“I see. Take care. When you are free, come visit again.”

With a respectful bow, Louise withdrew.

When Henrietta sat down on her chair, she lifted her hand. Gazing at the Ruby of Wind at the center of her palm, the exhausted, young queen murmured,

“...Go love somebody else, you had said that. I had thought that I would not love anyone ever again. But...”

Mixed with sighs, Henrietta muttered,

“Whether this is love or not, I don't know. Just that, sometimes when I think of

this, in my chest, a little fire is lit up.”

Someone knocked on the door.

“Who is it?”

“It is me.”

It was the voice of the secretary who managed Henrietta's schedule. "Please enter," she prompted. A lady in her thirties with her hair tied into a bun and glasses on her face entered the room.

“I would like to have the privilege of confirming your majesty's plans for the next two weeks...”

“Please.”

The secretary read out the plans one by one. The worst ones were back to back plans. *Not being able to catch my breath, surely I would be like that. One of these days, my sleeping time would be scraped off as well,* she muttered in her heart.

“Well then, on Freya's Day of the first week, there is a dining meeting with the ambassador of Romalia... On this occasion, please put on the Romalian formal dress. Consequently, within thirty minutes, please change your clothes.”

“Yes.”

Henrietta heaved a sigh, restrained her feelings, and as if she was not feeling even the tiniest speck of fatigue, answered.

“For the next day, the Day of Void... what do you plan to do?”

The secretary lifted up her spectacles, displaying a worried gesture.

“What do you mean, 'What do you plan to do?'”

“Umm... The plan is to attend the Ball of Sleipnir... should we cancel it?”

“Is it okay?”

Henrietta asked, in a tone as if feeling relieved. A resting day was more valuable than gold,

“Yes. Because it is just the welcome party of the new students at the Academy of Magic. Mr Osman, who had invited your majesty to this ball, probably has confused this school activity with that of nation's activity.”

A ball in the Academy of Magic...

Moreover, the Ball of Sleipnir was not an ordinary ball. Participants would masquerade as others. Further still, it was not to disguise by means of a mask and costumes.

Henrietta lifted her face.

“I will attend. Please plan accordingly.”

“If Your Majesty could attend it, certainly everyone would be happy... but if you take the day off as rest-”

The secretary, who knew above anyone else how heavy Henrietta's work was, said in a seemingly worried expression.

“The Academy of Magic is the place where the younger generation of nobles who carry the future of the country is educated... For those freshmen, there is a need to encourage them as well.”

She said this, and the secretary did not have any disagreements after that.

"The arrangements will be made."

With those words, she withdrew.

Henrietta sat on her chair once again, lifting up her hand. She touched her reddened cheek with her hand, and bit her fingernails.

Chapter Seven: Solicitation

Thirty meters in the sky of Tristania... a dragon knight was patrolling in the air.

Though it was not war time, there were always one or two dragon knights in the air, since air pirates and mysterious creatures could attack the capital anytime.

On this day, the one who was on duty was Rene of the capital escort Dragon Knight Regiment First Battalion, the same one who had previously fought together with Saito.

The dragon he lost in Albion was replaced by a new white wind dragon he obtained, and Rene was circling the sky of Tristania slowly. Feeling cold, Rene buried his face in the neckband of his boar-leather coat.

“The sky is freezing... Dammit! The war has already ended! But when it comes to handling the men of the Dragon Knight corps, it's always the same! As for that SAITO who was installed as the Assistant Commanding Officer of the Imperial Guards, why was he treated differently!? Well... just because he stopped that seventy thousand strong army, that promotion was still not the way to do things...” *grumble grumble*

As if responding to Rene's grumbles, his new partner dragon made a *"Kyui"* sound.

“Ryusto, it's not really your fault. Because it's the duty of the dragon knights to fly in the air.”

He stroked the dragon's head gently, at which the wind dragon narrowed its eyes happily.

However, in the following instant... the wind dragon opened its eyes wide in alert. Not allowing even the smallest glint of light escape, those pupils opened like an animal from the cat family.

“What's wrong, Ryusto?”

Waruuuuuuuuuu...

A low growl came out from the Wind Dragon's mouth.

Rene stared at the spot where his dragon was looking at.

Dragons had excellent night vision compared to humans. Rene, been a human, could not clearly make out that "thing" in the darkness.

“What, is that...?”

Illuminated by the moonlight, between the opening of the clouds, there was something there.

There was a gigantic wing... The overall width could easily be more than 100 meters.

That thing was flying slowly in the air. Moreover...*Shunshunshunshun...*it made a sound which he had not heard before.

Rene gulped.

He was frightened by the silhouette which was like a giant monster spreading its wings.

“Don't tell me that's a reincarnation of the legendary demons... Oi, Ryusto! Get closer!”

But the wind dragon did not obey his command. Far from it, it turned on it's heels and started to retreat.

“Oi Ryusto! What's wrong! I have to check out what that thing is!”

Despite Rene's desperate rebuke, with a purring ‘’Kyui’’ sound, the wind dragon descended away from the object. Ryusto, who was still young, was evidently afraid of such a huge thing.

“How I miss Virkan who died in Albion!! Without being afraid, without even a command, he would just rush forward!!”

Rene cried out regretfully.

The next afternoon... the location was changed - Tristain Academy of Magic.

"The Ball of Sleipnir?" Saito asked Malicorne, who was in front of him.

During lunch both of them sat together. Saito hadn’t been sitting with Louise lately. He was often sitting with the company of Undine (Knight Corps of the Water Spirit) and having his meals with them.

“Yeah, its the ball that begins with the new school term. Do you know when it starts? Ah nevermind, you probably don't know either.”

Although he said “new school term”, Saito was still a bit confused. Because he could not tell which month was which over here. Still, it felt somewhat warm of late, so perhaps it was springtime.

Come to think of it, there was a certain ceremony recently, and many noble teens attended. However, the figures of the third-years could not be seen anymore. Did they graduate? Moreover their replacement with first-year students... Oh I see! That was the school entrance ceremony. Saito thumped his knees.

“But why is there a ball for the new school term?”

Guiche, who was sitting beside him, explained,

“Well, isn't a welcome necessary? Among the newly enrolled noble lasses, there are quite a number who are entering the higher society for the first time. I will carefully teach those girls the adult social life! Yeah, adult social life! Oh, there are boys as well...”

Looked like the point was to welcome the new students.

"Hmmm guess so," Saito nodded, while filling his mouth with grilled meat. With the sour taste of the fruit sauce, it was delicious.

Looking around, it seemed not everybody was dinning elegantly with their table

utensils. Some were hitting their plate with the fork, making a loud "*gacchagaccha*" noise, some were gulping down their soup with a "*zuzuzu*" noise, spilling it haphazardly.

Although Louise and the other girls ate quietly with polite table manners, Guiche and the other boys' way of eating was terrible.

Their table manners are quite bad. Since I've only recently arrived in this world of nobles, I have to do better... While thinking that, Saito ate politely.

"But this, is no ordinary ball!"

Draining his wine cup quickly, Guiche stood up. Malicorne gulped his down forcefully as well. These two had been on a drinking spree since noon. With good manners, Saito squeezed some lemon juice into his carbonated drink. Speaking of nobles, these guys were definitely of the inferior group with bad manners. Saito made the weird resolution to be at least of the superior group.

"What do you mean by 'ordinary'?"

"Masquerade."

Guiche said triumphantly.

"Masquerade? That's nothing special. There are many balls like that."

Malicorn laughed lightly at Saito's words then made a "fuun" sound in reply.

But at the next moment... the conversation behind his seat entered Saito's ears.

"Have you heard? The word is going around that a 'mysterious bird' had been seen in the skies of Tristania."

"Yeah. My elder brother who serves in the dragon knight corps heard the rumor as well... is it true?"

The ones who were conversing were two lads of the same class. Saito strained his ears towards them. Not noticing Saito's actions, Malicorne continued his explanation.

“Get it? The masquerade ball of the Academy of Magic is not as simple as the usual “masquerade”. It is a masquerade that uses magic. The “Mirror of Truth” is used. With it, you can even transform into the ideal self you most admire!”

After that, Guiche declared pridefully.

“The ideal self. Well, my ideal self is me!! Ah, because I am the most handsome one in the world! Ahaha! Ah! Everyone will change into my appearance! Ah! Ahaha! Ah!”

As he was yelling this, Guiche hugged himself tightly.

However, Saito was no longer listening to Malicorne and Guiche's chatter. He was thoroughly into the conversation behind his seat.

“...and, I heard that its width was over 150 meters!”

“Can it be a ship?”

“Is there a ship with such an appearance?”

“Then a dragon? An enormous one. A legendary huge dragon.”

“Nope, its wings were completely different from those of a dragon. If I had to say, it had the form of a bird with wings spread... the word was that it was some kind of bird-like monster.”

Unconsciously, Saito had left his seat to listen to those words.

“Can you tell me the details?”

Those guys told him the rumor that had transpired at the palace lately.

In his night patrol in the air, a dragon knight sighted a huge “shadow”.

Its wings was easily more than 100 meters.

It made a strange sound, and so on...

“So, what on earth was that?”

“I don't know. They said the dragon of that dragon knight was frightened... no, the one who was frightened might've been the dragon knight himself... he fled instead of approaching that object to have a closer look. After hearing the news, another dragon knight ascended the air, but it had already disappeared from the skies of Tristania like a mist.”

“What...?”

“Well... it's possible he was mistaken and it was actually a cloud or something like that...”

“Hmmmmm...”

Saito was feeling somewhat uneasy. He remembered the encounter with "Myoznitnirn" from before...

Able to manipulate all magical items, and same as him, a “familiar of Void”...

Assuming that it was neither a dragon nor a ship... could it be a magical item like those gargoyles??

Since there were no further details about that thing, there was no point dwelling on it... at any rate, they can't afford to be negligent. Those guys Saito and the rest met in Albion, who had animosity towards them, were neither Fouquet or Wardes nor Reconquista. Their true motives were still unknown. Were they from a particular country, group or something else... Saito couldn’t tell. They were a creepy bunch.

Henrietta had investigated it... but they did not acquire any new information, and no new word of them came thus far.

Saito pondered over the situation while returning to his seat.

Malicorne found fault with Saito, and said as if he was displeased.

“Oi, listen properly to our words! Leaving your seat in the middle of a conversation is really rude!”

“Hmm? Aah, sorry. Umm, what was that about the masquerade?”

He remembered that they were in the conversation about a different type of masquerade ball.

“That's enough!”

“Sorry, sorry. Don't be angry like that. Don't you guys worry about that? The mysterious, enormous shadow that appeared in the skies of Tristania?”

“Look isn't that a mistake? Just a bunch of false positives during the night air patrol! If the information was about naked princesses flying in the sky then we'll definitely launch a proper investigation into it!”

Guiche spoke in a foolish tone.

As this chatter continued, a spectacled lad opened his mouth.

“Hey, you guys. Whether its the ball or the mysterious shadow, who cares? You should be thinking more about the affairs of the Undine Knight Corps!”

Saito sat down beside Guiche, and looked at the speaker. It was the chap from the next class called Reynald. During Albion's military campaign, he apparently directed the wagon corps. Not discouraged during the chaos of their retreat, he kept the unit in order. Because of that, he was commended.

“Do you know what we are called in the palace? “Students playing as Knights”! My uncle, who is serving in the palace, heard a rumor today; something like we had made her majesty disappointed and worried.”

All the members present there displayed affronted-looking faces.

“We have given some distinguished military service, but that level of success is expected from the Imperial Guard. Compared to the great Knight Corps of old, we’re like "children playing around" they said. There’s no way we can settle for something like that! Therefore, Guiche, Saito, we want you to think about this matter seriously.”

Guiche and Saito exchanged glances.

“You're probably right, b-but, what should we do?”

“We want you to power up our battle lineup. Presently, isn't Saito the only Chevalier?”

“Though you say that, Chevalier isn't a title you can receive just like that...”

At Guiche's words, Reynald smiled sweetly.

“I know of another one.”

During lunch break, all the group members went to the library.

At the side of the library where people didn't often go, there was a girl there.

Her small body was hunched over, intent on reading the book in her hands with utmost attention.

The blue-haired girl was Tabitha.

“Huh? When did she come back?” Guiche whispered.

Indeed, she went with Kirche to Germania together.

“Looks like she came back two or three days ago.”

“She has such a light presence, almost like a shadow. Hmm...”

Guiche spoke as if he was troubled.

“But can she really join our company? Isn't she a girl?”

“Look she is certainly a 'Chevalier'. In such a case, we can't be discriminating against gender. The condition to be enlisted in “Undine” is “a student of the Academy of Magic”. Only that. There's no rule which forbids the participation of females.”

“The only reason its not in the official documents is because we never had a chance to add it. It happens. Besides girls don’t want to join anyway...”

Guiche said.

“But according to the rules I'm not a student here either.”

Saito pointed out.

“Isn't it fine? If that's the case, we can also change it to “Beings that live at the Academy of Magic” instead. It's decided now. That's it. I decided it.”

Reynald declared arrogantly. Not matching his obedient and quiet-looking appearance, he had a really forceful character. Evidently, he intended to persuade the Commanding Officer and the Assistant Commanding Officer to let him shoulder the practical business of the knight corps.

“Is it okay? After all, both of you have no interest whatsoever in “administration” and “reputation”. For the continuation of the knight corps, above everything else, these two things are indispensable. I think that if the knight corps follow my own way, we would not be called fools in the palace. If you have a better plan, tell me.”

At those words, Saito and Guiche were speechless.

“Well then, I'll persuade her.”

Reynald stepped forward, but Saito stopped him.

“Wait!”

“What's the problem? Do you have any complaints!?”

“No. Just in case, Guiche and I will go. Hey, Guiche!”

“Huh? A-Ah.”

Leading Guiche, Saito sat beside Tabitha who was reading a book.

“Yo, Tabitha...”

Saito was fairly bad at dealing with this blue-haired girl. At any rate, when it came to this girl, she neither chattered, nor responded, she had a somewhat unfriendly atmosphere.

Although Saito sat down, Tabitha still did not have any response.

“You had gone to Germania together with Kirche huh. Oh yea, umm... to bury Colbert-sensei's remains...what happened after that?”

Tabitha did not reply.

“Is Kirche still there?”

At which Tabitha nodded. However, she seemingly did not intend to say anything at all.

“I see... when will she come back?”

“Don't know.”

Anyway, it was as if there were things she did not want to say. No, she probably just spoke little.... After that, Saito had given up asking.

“Other than those things, I have a favor.”

Guiche cut into their conversation.

“By all means, won't you join our knight corps?”

“...”

Tabitha did not even try to lift her face from that book.

“Err... we’ve only recently been made into a knight corps... can you help and lend us a hand?”

Saito said.

But as expected, Tabitha did not respond.

“You're a Chevalier right? Can't you use those skills for the sake of our Undine knights?”

“I am a Gallian.” Her answer had barely escaped her lips.

“Is there a problem being a Gallian? If you like, we can offer you a honorary 'guest knight' status.”

Reynald, who had been standing there unnoticed, said encouragingly.

“We can negotiate the increase of annuity as well...”

Tabitha shook her head. The blue hair above her head shook alongside it. Saito remembered the dream he saw in Albion some time ago. During that time, he recalled those throbbing breasts... and her usually stern face, acting a little embarrassed. Upon closer look, Tabitha was a real beauty as well. It was just that... her icy facial expression had been concealing her charm.

Watching her face closely.... *Is there nothing I can do?* Saito thought.

With a serious face, Saito said to Tabitha.

“I have become a 'Chevalier' as well, just like you.”

“Chevalier?”

At that, Tabitha lifted her face for the first time.

“Yeah. Because I want to help people in need. You’re the same way right? I was just a commoner before, but with this Chevalier title, maybe I can do something good. Whether I would do well or not, I do not know. But I’ll try my best. You're strong, aren't you? How do I put it? Umm...”

Saito said towards Tabitha, slightly embarrassed.

“Won't you try to use that strength for the sake of society?”

After hearing those words, Tabitha closed her book and stood up.

“Oooh, you're coming along, right?”

Guiche let out a delighted voice.

But...

“I have no interest in pretending to be knights.”

Leaving that short sentence behind, Tabitha walked off.

“Grrrrrrrrr... What's that brat's problem! We had asked her so nicely, and yet she left with such an attitude!!”

Guiche stamped his feet on the ground in frustration.

“Well, don't take it personally. She's probably very busy with other things to do.”

Saito tried to cheer up the angry Guiche.

Tabitha went back to her room, and discovered a crow on top of her bed. It looked like a carrier crow, bringing a secret message from the Gallian royal family. The delivery bird differs occasionally, there were times when owls or pigeons were used.

However today’s crow didn’t seem be carrying any secret letters.

Looking puzzled, Tabitha tilted its head to one side, and *bang!* Emitting a sound, it cracked into half.

Upon closer inspection... it was actually an elaborate model of a crow. A type of magical doll akin to a 'gargoyle'. Inside the cavity of the crow model where it cracked apart, a letter was inserted.

She picked it up and browsed through it. Tabitha's eyebrows shifted slightly.

During that night... the place Tabitha were to visit on her wind dragon Sylphid was not Gallia, but Tristain.

Above the town which was glowing with lights, Tabitha jumped off from Sylphid. She recited a spell, and her body floated with Levitation, landing slowly.

The place where she arrived was a street along which suspicious-looking bars and gambling dens lined - Chicton Street. The Drunkards and ladies in revealing clothing, who were walking along the street that night, saw Tabitha land from the

sky. They were stunned for a moment, but then realizing that it was only a young child, the spectators suddenly had flippant smiles on their faces.

Although she might have been a noble, the girl was still just a kid. Teasing words came out from the mouths of the drunkards, who became more and more rowdy.

“What's wrong, missy? Can't find your way to the playground?”

“Oh my! Are you lost like a little dog? If I take you back to your owner, think I'll get a reward?”

Like water off a duck's back, Tabitha ignored those words, and headed towards one specific bar.

Although the place was on Chicton Street as well, this bar was more refined than the others. There were many people in noble or knight outfits. The tavern owner sitting behind the counter stared at Tabitha suspiciously.

“This is not a place for a noble's daughter to visit. Our premises can become quite chaotic. Its best for you to return home.”

In spite of that, Tabitha did not move.

Shaking his head, the owner drew closer to Tabitha's face.

“Hey, miss. Although I dunno what sort of magic you use, there are people who with bad intentions in this place. While you are not involved in anything troublesome yet...”

At the moment when the tavern owner was warning Tabitha, a lady with a deeply set hood sat down beside Tabitha.

“Sorry for being late. Friend of yours?”

The latter half of her words were directed towards the tavern owner. From the ambiance of that lady, the tavern owner sensed that it would be better for him not to poke his head into their affairs, and withdrew to the inside of the bar.

The lady in the thick robe looked at Tabitha.

“How do you do? Knight of the North Parterre, Tabitha-dono.”

After Tabitha lightly nodded, she spoke.

“Why?”

Why did she receive her task in Tristain and not Gallia? That was her question.

“This country will be the setting of the mission this time.”

“...”

That lady removed the hood she was wearing. She had almond shaped eyes, and between the flowing raven black hair, runic letters danced. It was the mind of god, Myozntnirn.

“Here are our master’s orders: although he had wanted the four existing "dragons" in this world to fight amongst each other... for some reason I don't understand, he has now decided to capture one of them.”

“...”

“That 'dragon' has a strong guardian. That's why he wants you to exterminate that guardian. During that time, I will take the 'dragon' for our master.”

“Exterminate that guardian?”

“Someone you know very well.”

Myoznitnirn showed Tabitha a slip of paper.

Seeing the name and portrait on it, Tabitha's eyes opened widely.

“If you manage to accomplish this task... there is a big reward. Your mother... she drank poison and became mentally ill, right? It's the medicine to regain her sanity.”

Tabitha lightly bit her lips and trembled. Then she glared at Myoznitnirn. Her eyes revealed feelings of clear hostility.

“Oh? The great Knight of North Parterre is troubled by her feelings toward her

acquaintances? Don't you understand? This is a chance for your mother to regain her sanity.”

Chapter Eight: The Ball of Sleipnir

A week later, on the Day of Void.

The Ball of Sleipnir was finally going to be held today.

It was supposed to be a day of rest, but the students of the Academy of Magic were restless all morning, even during breakfast.

"Who are you going as?"

"I'll try that."

It was what all the conversations were about.

Guiche crossed his legs, as proud as a peacock.

“I wonder who I should become? But, for someone as handsome as myself, is it not better to just remain as I am? Don't you think so too, Saito?”

“Yeah, yeah.”

Saito replied idly, regarding Guiche as something that was little more than a breeze in the wind. Sitting across from him was Malicorne, who was hugging himself.

“What should I do... if it remains like this, it looks like I'm going to have to become a beautiful girl."

“Just do that already."

“Sigh... what should I do? Isn't that a crime?"

“Of course it's a crime. I reckon that it warrants a death sentence."

“Haa... a death sentence... ha... ha..."

Malicorne stammered as he held his trembling body together.

Imagining the fat boy acting in the manner of a young girl almost made Saito throw up his breakfast.

However... to get so excited over some masquerade ball, these people sure were easy to please.

It's only putting on a little disguise, did it really require so much thought?

Saito thought to himself, not knowing that they would be disguising themselves using magic.

It really only required a little bit of thought to realize that the Academy of Magic would never hold an ordinary masquerade ball... but, being completely uninterested in the matter, Saito never considered this.

Siesta was cleaning the room when Saito returned after breakfast.

“Welcome home, Saito.”

“Yeah, I'm back."

Siesta was cleaning the room with a bright smile on her face.

“Today's the day of The Ball of Sleipnir.”

“Is Siesta going too?” Saito asked.

“I'm going... because they are shorthanded..." Siesta replied shyly with her head down for some reason.

“I see..."

So, should I go or not? Saito pondered.

Siesta walked towards Saito and looked into his eyes.

"Umm..."

“Ah, yes?"

“I've been reading a book lately." Siesta said, as she pulled out a book.

“What's it about?"

Siesta can read as well, Saito thought.

“Oh, I forgot Saito can't read."

Siesta blushed as she explained the story to Saito.

“The name of the book is 'A Housemaid’s Afternoon.'”

“Uh huh.”

“It's a story about a young maid serving in an aristocrat's residence. And the master of that residence is a man who is corrupted to the core.”

“Uh huh.”

“Every night, he would coerce the maid into doing unpleasant things with him."

“Unpleasant things?”

Siesta muttered something into Saito’s ear.

A painful sensation tingled in his nose, and a torrent of blood flowed out. Five seconds later, he finally held it in.

“...What sort of books do you read?"

“W-What do you mean by that? It's from a girl in my dorm. She let me borrow it!"

Siesta blushed as her hands shook.

So, this is the stuff Siesta and the maids read in their spare time... But, then again, the girl magazines in my world are pretty risque as well...

Saito accepted this with his strange justification.

“Well...?”

“I’d hate it if a person like the master from the story were to touch me like that… but, if it were Saito…”

“What are you-”

Siesta covered her blushing face with her hands.

“N-Never mind! I was only joking!”

“O-Of course…” Saito laughed.

Then, Siesta tilted her head towards Saito with a curious glint in her eyes.

“But… how about we give it a try?”

“Huh?”

“A little trying won't hurt.”

Shocked and confused, Saito remained planted where he stood, as Siesta ran over to Saito with a look of distress, looking as though she had broken something.

“Ah! Oh no, I broke master’s cup!”

“…”

“It's Saito’s turn now.” Siesta said in a serious tone.

“W-What am I supposed to do?”

Walking up to Saito’s side, Siesta began to mutter in a slight whisper.

Pshhh~~

In that instant, blood spurted from Saito’s nose.

“S-Siesta?”

“Please punish me! I wish to be punished by Saito! L-Like this!”

With a cry, Siesta melodramatically fell onto the floor. She tilted her head up towards Saito, her face as red as a ripe apple. An intense aura of abuse and neglect seemed to emanate from her.

Siesta gently lifted up the hem of her skirt.

“M-Master, please punish me as you see fit…"

What is that maid rambling on about… and what's a guy like me supposed to do…

Only meaningless words passed through Saito's lips.

At the same time, Louise was quickly approaching by horse.

Saito hesitantly went to the shelf where the horse whip was hidden. Nearly fainting from all the blood rushing to his head, Saito could resist no longer.

At that instant, Louise opened the door.

In front of her eyes was Siesta, collapsed on the floor with her skirt pulled up and saying something about waiting for her master's punishment, and Saito, with the whip from the shelf in his hand. Louise promptly spun around and landed a kick directly on Saito's crotch.

"The two of you, stop this at once!"

Saito collapsed onto the ground with his hands between his legs. Louise planted her foot on his face and ordered,

"Maid! Familiar! The two of you, listen!"

"Yes!" Saito and Siesta replied in unison.

"There better not be a next time... You may be an incompetent familiar, but, your master has a task for you."

"W-What is it?"

"The Ball of Sleipnir is today. You know that, right?"

"Uh huh."

"Do you know what kind of ball it is?"

"Well, umm… is it a masquerade ball?"

"That's right. A ball where you 'masquerade' as your ideal. S-so, y-you must find me during the ball."

“Huh…?”

What is the meaning of this?

Siesta and Louise glanced at each other.

Huh—it looked like they were plotting something.

Women sure are so superficial… Saito thought. *The war had only ended not long ago, and already they are engrossed in something like a ball. Shouldn’t they be more concerned about contributing to society or something?*

“The two of you…”

Saito sighed, removing Louise’s leg and pulling himself up, silently brushing off the dirt on him.

“Ehh? What?”

“Yes?”

“The two of you, sit here.”

“What is it?”

“Listen up.”

The two of them looked at each other before reluctantly sitting on the bed.

Saito faced the two of them.

“You two should be more concerned about this world and the people in it!”

Louise was shocked.

It seemed that a desire to help the world had suddenly awakened in Saito. It was probably because of Colbert. That teacher had always pursued his research for this same reason.... Was he trying to succeed his dying wish? It seemed so.

So that's why he was so willing to pour everything into his duty in the knight corps.

In Louise’s view, however, it was never his duty to begin with.

What Saito should be doing… is to find a way to return to his world.

It was only after doing this could Saito seriously consider the matters of this world. Whether to remain or not was up to him… Plus, even if there was a way, would one be able to travel freely between the two worlds?

Her mind raced back and forth.

“To change the world through the knight corps? Are you a fool?”

Louise spat out, angering Saito.

“What? Why do you insist I’m a fool?”

“There are other things you should be doing!”

“Like protecting you? Didn’t I already tell you I’ll do that too?"

“It’s not that!” Louise yelled.

“T-Then what is it?”

“It’s finding a way for you to return to your world, of course. To send you home, and relieve your family.”

Idiot... But Saito had nothing to say.

“Looking at the you right now, it just doesn’t feel natural. The matters of this world should just be left to the people of this world."

“B-But…”

“If we were to take the duty of the knight corps, for example, all there is to it is war, that, or protecting Her Majesty the Queen. Sure, it is without a doubt a duty of the utmost importance, but it is not one for you to take. Why are you so intent on this?”

...Saito lowered his head.

Everything no longer looked clear to Saito.

True, Saito had wanted to accomplish something.

Up until now, he had always lived a simple, ordinary life... and that’s why now he wished to accomplish everything that he could. But it would be too difficult to explain this to Louise.

Louise sighed.

“Regardless of what happens... you must attend the ball today. You haven’t forgotten what I said earlier, right?”

“Yeah, yeah."

Just when it seemed like she was done, Louise began to blush.

“If you do…”

“If I do…?”

“Then… I’ll let you finish what you started that night, back in Albion…”

Siesta glared at Louise.

“To use such seductive methods...”

Louise angrily turned her face away, and left the room.

Left where he was, Saito slowly collapsed, his nose spouting blood like a geyser.

“Keep yourself together, Saito!” Siesta urged as she tended to him.

When evening came, “The Mirror of Truth” was drawn out from the treasure vault onto entrance of the dance hall in the second floor. A black curtain was pulled around the magic mirror. No one could tell what form the person within would transform into.

Miss Chevreuse, wearing a butterfly mask, stood at the side of the curtain.

“Noblemen and noble ladies, tonight I will guide you into a world of fantasy.”

She enthusiastically announced to the line of students. Louise, who was also in the queue, was pondering who to transform into.

Doubt began to creep into her mind.

Will Saito recognize me after I've changed?

He should be able to…

It was Louise’s turn. She walked through the curtains. There was only a mirror inside, which was roughly two meters high, installed on a simple frame, and covered by a cloth.

Miss Chevreuse’s voice echoed from outside,

“Please listen well. You must think only of the person you wish to become the most and not be distracted by anything else. This mirror will look into your heart’s deepest desires, and grant you that form. Once you’ve prepared yourself, please remove the cloth.”

Louise took a deep breath. "Okay." She lifted the cloth from the mirror.

A beautiful mirrored surface emerged from beneath it, radiating all the colors of the rainbow.

The reflection that graced the mirror’s surface was gradually enveloped by the radiant glow.

The flowing lights suddenly disappeared, once again returning her surroundings to darkness.

However, it was no longer Louise in the mirror.

What had appeared instead was the reflection of a gentle, warm, pink-haired, twenty-three-year-old lady.

It was the figure of Louise’s second sister, Cattleya.

Cattleya was her ideal. Her sister, who was kinder than anyone else… Louise gently placed her hands on her breasts.

Walking into the hall, it was filled with all kinds of people: heroes of legend, famous royals, renowned nobles, as well as old gentlemen and ladies. *They're probably the students’ parents.* There were even fellow students, but they were probably not the actual people.

I didn’t think there would be this many Henriettas. Louise smiled wryly.

It was only on this day that it was practically impossible to tell who was who. To wish to dance with a promised date, there was little else one could do apart from telling the other who you had become.

Saito should be able to find me, right? Louise sighed to herself.

I think he should be able to recognize me. After all, I took on Cattleya’s appearance.

Seeing that all the students were more or less present, Headmaster Osman walked onto the platform.

“Greetings, everyone. I would like to welcome you all. Tonight, we hold a ball to help our new students deepen their relationships and friendships. This ball is, of course, anonymous. This is so that not one person should be afraid to be discriminated against because of their family, status or nationality. It is also to let everyone know that everyone is equal within the walls of this academy. And I hope it will leave such an impression on you, as if it does not, it would become impossible for you all to study and develop harmoniously as one.”

Osman then made a dense cough.

“If you wish to introduce yourself to your partner, simply introduce yourself politely. Do not be caught up in the other’s appearance or status, or feel a need to

introduce yourself in a dignified manner. This is one step of the decorum in the noble’s code we do not need to follow.”

The students who had gathered nodded their heads.

“Because of the alarm it might have caused everyone, it has yet to be announced... that Her Majesty, Queen Henrietta, is also here tonight.”

The hearts of the students leapt.

“Moreover, in the spirit of this ball, Her Majesty herself has also changed. Let us all try to guess who Her Majesty is… I think this will be quite interesting.”

The students grew restless. An opportunity to converse with the Queen like this did not come very often. There were already many people who were glancing left and right to spot any likely candidates.

Louise was surprised too. *If you were coming, would it hurt to tell me first?* Louise fumed silently.

“Carrying on… I would like to speak about the aim of this ball. Everyone, listen well. You have all now become an image of your ideal. I hope that in getting closer to achieving your ideals, you are not daunted by it, but rather are willing to study hard in the new term, so that you may one day become outstanding nobles that others will aspire to. That... is all."

The hall resounded with thunderous applause.

Headmaster Osman, with a grim face, left and passed through the mirror, then returned. He had transformed into a young, dangerously seductive young woman. Striking a pose, the woman declared:

“I’m Little Osman~~"

The students, still captivated by the speech earlier, instantly fell into a stunned silence, like a flame that was just doused. The teachers silently grabbed both of Osman’s arms and dragged him aside.

“E-Everyone, make sure you enjoy the ball!”

The struggling Osman was swiftly escorted from the hall.

Music began to play… the Masquerade Ball had finally started.

Louise looked left and right, but could not see anyone who could be Saito.

It looks like it'll be a while before he gets here.… Louise sighed as she leaned against the wall.

When Saito arrived at the assembly hall, the ball had already started. It was because he had to take care of his horse that he was late. He had experienced how difficult it was to feed an animal, and wasted no short amount of time doing so.

As he walked past the curtain at the entrance, he didn't notice the mirror within it. Rather, it would be more accurate to say that he was completely unaware that the mirror had something to do with the disguises.

Saito walked into the grand hall, and was about to be questioned by the guard at the entrance before the guard noticed the Chevalier badge on Saito's mantle and nervously saluted him.

It was dim inside the hall, making it difficult to see clearly.

Saito remembered what Louise had told him earlier:

I'll let you finish what you started that night back in Albion.

They were such disastrous words. *For her to actually say this, I have to punish her accordingly...D-damn it.* Saito searched for Louise frantically, his mind boiling.

However, she was nowhere to be seen.

Since it's a masquerade ball, maybe she put on a mask? That's what I would think, except there isn't a single person here who's wearing one. And, there isn't

anyone I recognize in the crowd, apart from the few students mingled within. Everywhere he looked, there were seemingly important people dancing and conversing.

Saito finally found Louise standing next to a wall and enthusiastically ran towards her.

Raising her head to see Saito running towards her, Louise blushed.

A promise is a promise. Saito began blushing as well.

“Didn’t I find you pretty quickly? So... is it okay… to fulfill that promise?”

Louise squirmed nervously.

“…Promise?”

“What, have you already forgotten?” Saito asked back.

“I’m sorry, dear...”

“Dear? But you've always called me…”

“Saito-san.”

“That’s right.”

Louise’s face blushed and became redder. *What’s wrong with her… did she fry her brain?* But, it only made Louise even cuter.

“About what you said before... what were you trying to say?”

“What I said before?”

“Quit acting like you don’t know! Weren't you the one who said it?”

“…What kind of promise was it?”

Why is she speaking in such an excessively polite manner… Is she just messing with me? Saito exasperated.

At that moment, the orchestra began to play a vigorous melody.

“It’s so noisy… let’s go outside.”

Saito, grabbing Louise’s hands, led her to the veranda outside.

“…Ah!” Louise cried out in surprise, but, she obediently followed Saito.

Arriving at the veranda, Saito faced Louise,

“Geez… didn’t I already tell you not to joke about those kinds of things? Did you think I wouldn't take them seriously?”

“…I-I’m sorry.”

Louise appeared even more endearing as she apologized, making Saito want to just grab and hold her in his arms. *I’ll just think of it as revenge for everything she’s put me through.*

“If you won’t apologize properly, I’m going to kiss you right here.”

Louise silently lowered her head, but Saito raised it with his hand.

“…Ah.”

Louise looked up at Saito, her eyes glistening. Such an expression seemed to stop his heart, drawing his breath away...

Saito could not stop himself from planting his lips onto Louise's lips.

He then pulled her into his arms, tightly embracing her, while Louise simply surrendered herself to him meekly.

Just like that.....Louise was pushed to the corner of the wall.

Although there was no one else on the veranda, if someone were to see this, it would become quite troublesome.

Saito decided to slowly separate himself from her.

“Nn…!”

But today’s Louise was strangely assertive, continually pressing her body against Saito’s.

“Louise…”

Could it be that Louise… has always been this lonely?

Saito’s heart overflowed at Louise’s act of affection. Unknowingly, Saito already had his hands on Louise’s chest.

Completely unlike the Louise from the past, she did not express any displeasure.

"It was only a reward!".... When Louise had said that, my heart was deeply hurt.... But, now I realize that it wasn’t just a reward! To Louise, I am…

“Louise—”

Saito tightly embraced Louise. A warm sigh escaped Louise’s mouth… *Saito is beside me.*

Meanwhile, at the entrance to the hall, the guard stationed there was questioning a very suspicious looking woman. Wearing a long black robe with long strands of black hair flowing from the opening of her hood, no matter how you looked at her, she didn’t look like a student or teacher.

“Who are you?”

“I was sent from the Royal Palace to attend this ball.”

“Royal Palace? Well…”

The guard began searching through the list of attendees.

“I’m afraid you won’t find my name written on that list.”

Before he could question her, the woman quickly revealed a small bell from her bosom.

“That’s…”

I had seen this when I was patrolling the treasure vault…

“The Bell of Slumber? Why-”

Just as he suspected something was wrong, the small bell rang out. *Cling…* The sound made a clear echo.

A deep drowsiness overcame the guard.

Going to fall asleep… was ambushed… But the guard was unable to resist.

His body fell against a wall, sliding slowly downwards along it… and he fell into a deep sleep.

“I *was* sent from the Royal Palace… just not Tristain’s.”

After confirming that the guard had fallen asleep, the long-robed woman walked into the curtain, and, noticing the Mirror of Truth within, revealed a wide grin.

She lifted the cloth and gently touched the mirror…

The mirror emitted a bright light, and, at the same time, the long-robed woman's forehead glowed.

If I can’t tell how they look like, this mission would be impossible. Myoznitnirn murmured.

Ancient runes began to shine on the woman’s forehead...

Saito kissed Louise’s lips.

Nn… ah… it's like I'm in a dream… Standing on the tips of her toes, Louise wrapped her arms around Saito’s neck.

She's different… more assertive than the usual Louise.

To actually be so forward…

A desire to love her even more emerged from within his heart.

Instinctively, he slipped his hand… onto Louise's small breasts.

"…Wha—?"

Saito immediately froze.

Her chest… was not small at all.

Actually it was… huge!

The full, soft and warm mound shifted and moved under Saito's palm. And each time he grasped it, Louise would pant even louder…

"When did it become…"

Saito opened his eyes.

He gasped in surprise… in front of him was…

"Your Highness!?"

It was Henrietta.

What the — when did they change places with each other? The person I'm hugging is the Princess?

The frantic voices of students echoed from the hall.

"What the-!? The magic was dispelled!?"

"But the ball hasn't ended yet!"

Saito finally understood that this was no ordinary ball, but a masquerade ball, where one could transform into another person through magic.

Does that mean Henrietta became Louise?

“But, why did you become Louise…?”

Henrietta shamefully lowered her head when asked.

“Today is the ball where you could become your ideal.”

“Your ideal?”

He still didn’t understand.

“But, why Louise?”

“Well, that is – that is because I’ve always admired that girl… A girl who's always acted with her heart… A pure girl with a heart and mind no one can possibly taint… To possess the virtues I have none of… I’ve always envied her from deep within my heart.”

“…”

“What kind of person am I, to tremble and waver, while that girl maintains her beliefs through thick and thin - her faith unshaken. I envy that about her. If I were to have even one-tenth of her courage, perhaps I wouldn’t have committed those sins.”

Seeing the pained look on Henrietta, Saito, wishing to comfort her no matter what, said,

“Sins…? Your Highness, you have done no wrong. So please don’t talk about things like sinning.”

“No… just for my own personal revenge, I actually started a war. How many people paid with their lives because of that?”

“But it was inevitable anyway, that’s just how war is!”

“So many died because of it!”

Saito recalled that the expeditionary army was practically made up of nobles and mercenaries. Furthermore, there were no citizens who participated.

“Even if you were to say so, but, still… no one was forced to go. Everyone went

because of their own wishes to do so; Some for glory, others for gold. Therefore, you shouldn’t worry yourself so much, Princess."

It was perhaps a cruel thing to say - to dishonor the dead like that - but, although there were exceptions, it wasn't wrong to say that the majority were either mercenaries who fought for gold or noble officers who cried out for glory… So, perhaps it wasn’t too harsh in the end. Saito rationalized to justify his earlier words.

Henrietta was unresponsive.

To change the topic, Saito decided to talk about Louise instead.

“So, why are you here today? Was it to find Louise? I’m looking for her too. Seriously, where did she run off to…”

Henrietta shook her head.

“I came here to see you.”

“…Me?”

“I don’t know why… but, whenever I hear your name… whenever I lay my eyes upon your face… for some reason, my heart... begins to…”

Henrietta looked up, the tears in her eyes slowly welling up.

“Do you still remember? That incident… that night at the small inn in Tristania…”

Saito nodded. That night, they actually pressed their lips together twice. Even now, his heart would race when he recalled it.

“Ever since that evening… every time I think of you, my heart aches. The heartache steadily grew deeper and deeper… I don't know when I've noticed it, but I felt peaceful while I'm in such pain… It was always lingering in my heart… I didn't know what to do about it anymore.”

“…”

“In the midst of all the frantic frenzy and arduous planning, it was only your warmth that protected me. When I found your name among the list of those killed in battle… the grief was almost too much to bear. After that… when I found out it was you who had stopped the army of seventy-thousand, do you know how much of a redemption it was for me?”

For someone of Henrietta’s eminence to so frankly express her feelings.… Saito was at a loss, thinking ‘what a frail person she was’.

But, it was because of this same vulnerability that Henrietta emanated a charm completely unlike Louise’s.

Just as he was about to be overcome by that charm, Saito turned his face away and gently pushed Henrietta away from him.

“If we were to be seen like this here… nothing good will come to Your Highness and me.”

Unexpectedly, Henrietta dragged Saito into the curtains, concealing them both within its shadows.

“Princess…”

“I understand that as well. But… even if it's only for a little while, all I wish is to spend a few more moments of happiness with you. Is that too much to ask? Are you not able to give me even this little bit of your time?”

“…”

“And, even though it will only be for a little while that I can experience happier times... if it was possible, I would remain by your side forever.”

Henrietta cried like any ordinary girl. *The once resolute Queen was actually shedding tears for my sake.…* Saito was dumbstruck.

Furthermore.… Henrietta was more beautiful than anyone else in the world. Even Louise couldn’t compare.

Henrietta once again lifted her face, edging ever closer to Saito.

Saito was utterly unable to resist those lips… and their lips pressed together.

After feeling out the kiss, Saito pressed his entire body onto Henrietta, pressing her against the wall.

As Henrietta panted tenderly, Saito slowly drew back his lips, watching her intently.

“Princess…”

Henrietta kissed Saito’s neck.

As though he had been struck by lightning, a shock coursed through his body.

Saito tightly embraced Henrietta.

It was at that instant…

In a small opening in the curtain, Saito saw strands of pink hair and the brown eyes below them.

“Louise…”

He felt the blood drain from his body. Henrietta also turned to look.

Louise’s entire body trembled as she watched the two of them behind the curtain, before suddenly running away, her hands covering the tears streaming down her face.

As Saito chased after her, he knocked into the students beside the curtain.

“Hey, that hurts!”

“Sorry! Excuse me! I’m in a hurry!”

However, not a glimpse of Louise could be seen within the crowd.

Because no one knew who dispelled the effects of the Mirror of Truth, the hall was in an uproar.

"What the hell?!"

"Did the Mirror of Truth’s magic backfire?"

Afterwards, Henrietta, her face visibly pale, also exited from behind the blinds.

The surrounding students at once exclaimed “Your Highness!” before rushing over to her.

Before he ran off, Saito glanced over at Henrietta to signal that he was going to chase after Louise.

Louise dashed out from the main tower, running in the night through the Academy grounds.

The pain and the shock tore her apart.

Saito and the Princess?

Why?

It was after they entered the curtains that Louise saw them. Having noticed them through the opening in the curtains by chance, she had walked over…

Remembering what they had said, the tears flowed down without end.

The two of them were so passionate… just like a pair of lovers as they made their vows.

And then… their lips met like long-separated lovers.

Don’t tell me they’ve had such a relationship for a long time? Could it be they’ve been lying to me all this time?

To be betrayed by Henrietta, whom I had trusted so…

Louise could no longer trust anyone ever again.

That means… Henrietta had only knighted Saito to a Chevalier and swore him in

as a knight captain so that she could be by the side of her lover.

During the last mission in Tristania, Saito had said he had kissed Henrietta. Of course, I was angry at the time… but, it was only for the sake of the mission. I didn't mind it much. But, it seems I was wrong.

Perhaps the two of them had kept this secret since that time.

"It's too cruel! It's too cruel! It's too cruel!" Louise kept shouting.

You've always been lying to me, what "I like you"? It was all a lie!

What Louise couldn't forgive the most was, *The promise he made to me, the time we spent together, that sweet kiss… the things I had always trusted completely… were all lies he had made to me.*

The things I most valued in my heart; the memories I most treasured in my heart… were nothing more than lies.

And the one to do this wasn't just anybody… but Henrietta, the person I had always held in the highest regard.

To be doubly betrayed like that, Louise couldn't bear it anymore.

Regardless, she couldn't remain here.

Louise slowly snuck out the gates of the Academy of Magic, before bolting outwards in a full sprint.

The guards that normally monitored the entrance, due to the commotion caused by the dispelling of the Mirror of Truth's magic, had all rushed to the hall. As a result, the place was empty. Without anyone to stop and question her, Louise headed along the small road leading to the city.

I don't want to stay here.

I want to go somewhere far away.

I want to go to a place where no one will recognize me.

With her heart bearing such thoughts, Louise kept running forward without any

regard.

Running till she was out of breath, Louise kneeled and collapsed onto the ground, her face covered by the ground and tears flowing down her cheeks…

Chapter Nine: Confrontation with the Mysterious Bird

Saito exited the main tower and immediately went to Louise's room to find her. However, she had not come back. "What if I can't find Louise..." That was the only thing on his mind.

He had never seen Louise so sad before.

It was his fault... regardless of the circumstances, it was unforgivable.

He wanted to meet her and apologize.

While he was running, Saito imagined Louise's feelings. She saw the princess she esteemed and... the familiar whom she always thought to be faithful, hugging each other as if they were lovers; how much were her feelings hurt?

Although they were not lovers... Louise had seen him allowing Henrietta to go as far as kissing, what a pain it must've been to her! Even thinking about this, Saito's heart ached.

Leaping out of the room, he immediately ran to the courtyard of the academy at night.

In the midst of the almost pitch-black darkness... Louise's figure could not be seen anywhere.

When he was going towards Vestri Courtyard...

The clouds cleared, and the moonlight revealed a figure; a shadow which was sitting on the bench could be seen.

“Louise!”

He unintentionally shouted and rushed forward, only to find that he was

mistaken.

“What? Oh, it's you...”

It was Tabitha. Not even attending the ball on such a night, reading a book on a bench to which no one would come; it was really typical of her.

“Hey, did you see Louise?”

Tabitha did not respond.

Staring fixedly at the book, just like that, her body did not stir an inch.

She didn't hear me? He thought, and repeated himself.

“Do you know where Louise is?”

The face which was illuminated by the moonlight, was completely pale.

At that moment... Saito realized that there was a shadow circling in mid-air with its back against the moon.

“What's that? It's not a bird... and it's got legs?”

With the figure of a human and flapping wings, it was a very strange creature. It looked like the demons he saw in manga and television in the former days.

“Gargoyle.” Tabitha said briefly.

“You...!” At the moment he said that, Tabitha waved her staff.

Buoo! A gush of air expanded towards him, and Saito was blown off his feet.

“What are you...!”

Not even having the time to shout, ice arrows aimed at Saito and flew towards him.

At a place somewhat far from the Academy of Magic, Louise was crying endlessly.

“Cruel... too cruel... why, why!”

Pitch black darkness was all around her.

It was as if she was left behind, all alone in this world. Yet, right now she was not fearful of the darkness. Rather, Louise felt it gave her broken heart comfort.

“Unforgivable... cruel... absolutely unforgivable...”

Her words and tears flowed endlessly together. Her misery kept feeding on itself.

She repeated those same words, over and over, and then...

“What's unforgivable?”

In the middle of the darkness, a voice could be heard.

Louise who was in a state of confusion, felt something reverberating inside her heart.

“I was betrayed. That's why, it's unforgivable.”

“By whom were you betrayed?”

“By someone who was dear to me...”

“Well then, you must take revenge.”

“Revenge?”

“It's unforgivable right? If that's the case, you must take revenge. You can do it. User of the great Void.”

At that, Louise came to her senses.

“...Who are you?”

“One of your friends. Since long ago... one who serves your people.”

“Who are you! Come out!”

Louise shouted into the darkness. Then she remembered the previous incident in Albion.

“Myoznitnirn?”

“You got it; but you're still wrong.”

She focused her eyes... and a winged shadow came into sight.

“...Gargoyle?”

As Louise was about to stand up,

“Don't worry. I will not harm you.”

The gargoyle which had appeared from the dark headed towards Louise's feet and crouched down reverentially.

“What... what's your intention! Myoznitnirn! You said you won't harm me! Then come out! Come and face me!”

However, the gargoyle opened its mouth.

“For what happened before, I apologize. But, that was a so-called test. To determine whether you deserve to be our ally or not.”

“Stop lying! You think I would believe those words?”

“Then, ask yourself. In this world, whose words do you believe in?”

Louise was speechless. Just a while ago... wasn't she betrayed by the two she believed in the most?

“My master can show you the way.”

“A lie... that's a lie!”

Louise's voice was becoming increasingly softer.

“The only one who can truly understand you... is a fellow user of Void. We want you to lend us your power.”

“...My power?”

“It's natural for you to be cautious. Yet, excessive caution would turn your eyes away from the truth.”

Whether or not it was magic, the gargoyle's voice was enchanting.

Gradually, Louise's caution disappeared.

Louise, who was confused because of her grief, did not know that she was falling for a trick.

“You, are you really my friend?”

“Of course.”

“My friend? You won't betray me?”

“I will definitely not betray you.”

The gargoyle slowly turned around, and showed Louise it's back.

“Please ride on me. Oh great master of the Void.”

Louise could not resist that voice any more.

She felt the gargoyle's back... and Louise's senses gradually faded. Slowly, as if she was falling asleep, Louise laid down on the gargoyle's back.

Gaa!

Gagaa!

Gagagagagaaa!

A storm of Windy Icicles - one of Tabitha's strongest attacks, flew towards him. Saito tumbled sideways to avoid them.

Clearly, it was an attack whose aim was to... kill Saito.

If he had not undergone Agnes' training, he would not have been able to evade them.

“What the heck!? What do you want!?”

Saito yelled in anger. He did not understand the reason behind this attack at all.

“Oi! Tabitha! You, what the hell... wh-!”

The response was magic.

Tabitha scattered Windy Icicles in all directions, surrounding him, and sent them flying.

Bashushushushushuuu!

After the smokescreen of water vapour produced by the countless Windy Icicles cleared up...

Contrary to her expectations, rather than seeing a skewered figure, Saito was standing there with Derflinger unsheathed. The Windy Icicles were absorbed by Derflinger, while the remaining ones were swiped away by Saito with his blade.

“What on earth, what's your reason? Why did you attack me? Explain!”

Tabitha lifted her staff.

“Because of a command.”

“Command? Who commanded you!”

As expected, her reply was magic.

Saito gripped Derflinger tightly and leaped. He planned to shorten their distance

in one movement... and knock down the staff Tabitha was holding. But Tabitha reacted to Saito's movements and leaped, passing by him. Her body moved agilely, just like the traditional Wind element which she prided in.

As if she were a clockwork puppet, Tabitha combined her body's skills and magic to dodge the sword Saito brandished.

“!?”

She was jumping up and down, evading the sword, and at the same time,

“Deru Bagaraasu.”

She chanted the spell, and subsequently, used magic to fly past him. Very slowly, as if she was chasing cotton wool.

And then, sometimes, she would utter incantations which would cause attacks like bee stings.

The air was distorted, and it attacked Saito.

“Air Hammer.”

At that instant the sword was already set up, but, taken by surprise, Derflinger could not absorb it.

Receiving the full blow, Saito was hurled into air.

“Damn...”

However, that attack did not carry strong powers.

It seemed that both sides lacked decisive blows. Just to match with Gandálfr's speed she had to put in a lot of effort.

Because she did not have enough time for her chants, she could not use strong incantations. Naturally, the Windy Icicles and Air Hammers were weakened.

Yet, Tabitha was fast.

With a small and light body, her movements were faster than Wardes whom he

had fought before this.

“The way this person moves. They are the movements of an assassin.”

Derflinger revealed its feelings.

“Assassin?”

“Yeah. Avoiding direct battles, and when the opponent reveals his weakness, deciding the victor in an instant. That girl's one by one strikes are not very strong. Her moves and speed are extraordinary though.”

“...Why is she doing so well, considering she's only holding a staff?”

“Partner's heart is uncertain, that's why.”

“That's very true! Why am I fighting her...!?”

Saito could not even display half of his usual power.

Unable to understand her reason for attacking, he could not fight Tabitha.

Before he knew it, in his defensive battle, Saito was driven into a corner. No... even if he could utilize Gandálfr's full power, Saito would not be able to fight Tabitha seriously. Even now, he could only draw his sword to try his best to knock off Tabitha's staff. Saito was that kind of person.

The offense and defense strikes continued back and forth...

Saito and Tabitha were confronting each other within a distance of 15 mails.

They were just barely out of the attack range of each other.

Just slightly further than the distance that Saito could cover in one jump.

Even if Saito just rushed forward, Tabitha could have just dodged it at this distance.

That was the same for Saito as well. Even if Tabitha uttered any spell... he had the confidence to deal with it from this distance.

“Oi! It's about time you give me a straight answer...”

At that moment,

“Are you having trouble dealing with him?”

As if reverberating in their heads, a voice could be heard from above the sky.

The gargoyle which they had seen before, was carrying something behind it and circling them.

It was a shadow.

In the moonlight, pink hair shone.

“LOUISE!”

Louise's body was seen, carried on the back of a gargoyle, she seemed to have fainted.

Saito unconsciously tried to run toward where Louise was... but before he could do that, Tabitha blocked his path.

“You... step aside!”

With eyes that revealed no emotion, Tabitha glared at Saito.

“There is no reason for her to step aside. This child is the Knight of the North Parterre. Our loyal watchdog.”

“Watchdog?”

“Isn't this amusing? Chevalier versus Chevalier. A combination for which my master would be jumping with delight.”

Tabitha bent her body slightly and readied her staff.

Heavy...

The atmosphere appeared to have turned heavy abruptly.

Her magical powers manifested into an aura, which drifted about around Tabitha, like a heat haze. Under the illumination of the moonlight, that aura squirmed about demonically.

Blue.

An aura that embodied Tabitha's power.

Saito gulped.

This girl's magical power was not just for show.

“Oi, Tabitha. Since Louise is at stake, I'll have to be serious.”

“...”

“Because you are strong, I can't go easy on you.”

Tabitha started to recite spells.

“Hey, Gandálfr. If you aren't serious, you'll get hurt. Don't you get it? If you continue like this, you can't save your precious master.”

“Step aside Tabitha! Just step aside!”

Ignoring his angry yell... Tabitha continued chanting her spell.

"Laguz Water Is Isa Hagalaz"

At the same time Tabitha rotated her staff to match the chant.

Magical power formed around her body like a serpent and changed into a huge ice javelin.

Guided by the staff... the ice javelin turned.

While turning, it kept on swelling... larger, sharper, and the blue radiance kept increasing.

Derflinger muttered.

“That 'Javelin'... its destructive power is strong. Don't get hit partner, or we'll be done for.”

“Oi, Tabitha! To save Louise I might have to kill you! Do you understand!?” Saito yelled.

“That is the same for this child as well.”

The gargoyle's shout reverberated from above.

“Do it! Partner!”

Saito shook his head as if giving up, and jumped.

Simultaneously, Tabitha swung her staff downwards.

With a wave of the staff, the huge Javelin aimed down and shot towards Saito.

The sword and the Javelin intersected each other.

Dissected by the sword, the Javelin broke and shattered into pieces.

But amidst the icy debris, Saito was hit by ice splinters which rained down like broken glass.

“Chi-!” Tabitha growled.

Finding a gap between the ice splinters, Tabitha brandishing her staff to fire off another Javelin.

“The first round was a decoy!”

Derflinger shouted.

Tabitha had completed two javelins at the same time just now.

“Uooooooo...!”

Together with his scream, the runes on Saito's left hand shone.

In a split second, he rushed over and knocked Tabitha down.

Straddling her small body with his knees, Saito pointed his sword at her.

But Tabitha would not release her staff.

“Throw away your staff!”

Saito shouted, as he readied his sword fiercely over her head.

Tabitha stared at Saito motionlessly.

Those eyes were... completely cold. It was unknown what kind of emotion laid hidden behind them.

The only thing they expressed was, "I will defeat the enemy".

The enemy that was in front of her.

That was what those eyes seemed to say.

Magical mist gathered around Tabitha's staff, the ice spell 'Javelin' was formed. Just by lowering her staff... the spear would be unleashed, and would pierce through Saito's body.

Without the slightest hesitation, Tabitha waved her staff.

“Stop!!”

Saito yelled, and swung his sword downward.

The ice spear was activated, and *Bang!*, both Saito and Tabitha were enveloped by a mist of water vapour.

Tabitha gazed at Saito, dumbfounded.

Saito's sword was stabbed into the ground beside Tabitha's face.

Tabitha's 'Javelin' which shone with a pale light... pierced Saito's side. Red blood flowed from Saito's wound... and dripped onto Tabitha's cheeks.

The snow white cheeks were stained in red.

“...Why?”

Without moving an inch, Tabitha asked Saito.

Saito ought to have impaled me by now.

Yet, Saito pointed his sword away.

“Dunno... I pointed it away unconsciously. How shameful... and I have to protect Louise... why did I spare the enemy...? I...”

Saito murmured with an anguished-looking face.

“But... you had saved us so many times, I suppose I can't kill you...”

“...”

“I wanted... to protect the people I hold most dear in life... even so, how could I sacrifice such another...?”

Tabitha's eyes opened big.

After that... from the inside of the transparent, blue eyes, tears welled up, overflowed from the side of her eyes... and trailed down her cheeks.

“What's the matter? What are you crying for? Your task hasn't finished yet. Deliver the finishing blow quickly!” The gargoyle demanded.

Tabitha sprang up, and with "Wind Break," blew the falling Saito off.

“Ouch!”

Tumbled over, Saito tried to stand up... but the side of his stomach hurt, and his body went numb- he could not move.

Tabitha waved her wand for a few times.

“Gou!” She shouted, and a whirlwind suddenly revolved around Tabitha, enveloping her.

In the midst of that, snow fragments glistened, sparkling.

Will I be killed by this beautiful snow...? In a daze, Saito thought...

Tabitha did not aim her staff at Saito, but at the gargoyle, and fired.

Mixed with snowflakes, the raging wind attacked the gargoyle with sheer force, cutting off its wings and knocking it to the ground. Louise, who was on the gargoyle, was thrown off at the same time.

Tabitha turned around toward Saito.

“Finish it off.”

Holding his wounded side, Saito moved towards the gargoyle, who was struggling to fly away.

“Oh my... Knight of the North Parterre. A pet dog defying its master?”

Tabitha lifted her staff.

“...Don't misunderstand. Never once have I swore allegiance to you people.”

The gargoyle, struggling with its severe wounds, spoke in a small voice.

“I will report on your treachery. Besides, we've already captured our intended prey.”

The moment those words were said...

A huge shadow fell from the sky.

With wings spanning 30 meters... it was a gigantic gargoyle.

“Hu-Huge!!”

This gargoyle was many times bigger than the one before.

Grabbing the unconscious Louise with its left hand, it quickly rose in the air.

By a mere flap of the wings of the gigantic gargoyle, Saito and Tabitha were blown away and hit the ground hard.

Tabitha, who recovered quickly, whistled.

Giving off a roar, Sylphid flew and landed in front of Tabitha.

Nimbly straddling the dragon, Tabitha called out to Saito.

“Come on.”

While holding his injured side, Saito climbed onto Sylphid's back. Tabitha held out her hand, helping him up.

“Chase them.”

At Tabitha's brief command, and with a *Kyui* sound, Sylphid soared into the sky.

Saito and Tabitha were riding Sylphid on its back, pursuing the huge gargoyle. Was Myoznitnirn controlling the gargoyles from somewhere...? Her figure could

not be seen on its back.

“Hey Tabitha. Tell me. Why did you attack me? Who are those people?”

Tabatha who was looking straight forward....

“We'll talk afterwards.” She murmured.

“Got it,”

Saito nodded. Indeed, now wasn't the time to listen to the reasons.

The flying speed of the gargoyle, flapping its wings, wasn't all that fast. Tabitha's Sylphid managed to catch up with it easily.

Its brutal form was exposed under the moonlight.

Before he realized it, Saito recalled the rumor he heard in the dining hall.

The huge wings which a dragon knight witnessed over Tristanian skies...

That figure must have been the one mistaken for a bird monster.

Its true appearance had to be this one.

The rumors that its wings span was 150 meters simply had to be an exaggeration.... The size might have appeared a few times larger due to the darkness and fear.

“Get closer! I’m ready!”

Tabitha nodded, and ordered Sylphid.

“Closer.”

"*Kyui*", at that moment when Sylphid purred...

In the sky, small black dots started to gradually appear.

“Wh-What is that...?”

They were gargoyles.

Like a flock of crows, the gargoyles, whose numbers covered the sky, flew towards them.

Moving by magic and their yellow eyes shining, The gargoyles started to surround Sylphid.

“Shit!”

There were already about several dozen near them.

To stop them from approaching the huge one carrying Louise, the gargoyles attacked with their claws and fangs.

“Kyui, kyui!”

Sylphid let out a terrified sound.

Tabitha chanted 'Windy Icicle' again... but only one of them fell. Because of her previous battle with Saito, it seemed like her willpower had depleted.

Saito grinded his teeth.

Without a good machine-gun and Gandálfr's powers, the situation looked hopeless.

“Crap... so what if I'm Gandálfr! Without the right tools, the weapon I'm holding might as well be a toy!”

This knight, who was once celebrated as a Chevalier, was quite embarrassed.

At that moment... Tabitha informed Saito softly,

“Up there.”

When Saito looked up, what he saw... was a huge shadow... spread over the sky.

“Wh-What is that....”

Truly colossal... nothing else could describe those black wings flying overhead.

Its silhouette looked like a monster spreading its wings...

Shushushushushu... a peculiar sound could be heard from it.

The dragon knight's report was not wrong.

Its overall width was more than 150 meters.

“This thing is so big... so it was all true!”

Compared to the flock of gargoyles and the one carrying Louise, this was about 5 times bigger. Apparently, it was an ultra big gargoyle...

It was unreasonable to even think about going against such an opponent.

If they didn't want to die, they had to escape from there.

In spite of that, Tabitha did not try to make Sylphid retreat.

On the contrary, she stopped doing evasive maneuvers and made a beeline towards their target.

“Oi, Tabitha! That's reckless!”

Tabitha stared straight at the gargoyle which was holding Louise.

To stop Tabitha, the gargoyles flew in front of them and targeted Sylphid's wings.

There were seven of them.

It was more than Saito could deal with.

“Run away Tabitha! It’s too dangerous!”

“...You saved me.”

“Eh?”

“I’ll help you save Louise even if it costs me my life.”

So Tabitha was even willing to risk her life for his sake. Bitter at his own helplessness, Saito grinded his teeth.

“Damn it all!!”

Like revolving lanterns, the faces of Louise, Siesta and Colbert flashed across his mind.

I couldn’t carry out teacher’s last wish.

I couldn't do it.

I wanted to protecting the one girl I loved but... I CAN’T EVEN DO THAT!

“Teacher! The things you did, I can't even do half of them... no, not even a tenth of them!”

Facing the sky, Saito yelled.

The seven gargoyles were approaching them from the front...

When they would come into contact with the gargoyles, they would surely be torn apart by those huge claws. But then, just as Saito thought they were finished...

Flames came shooting out of the massive shadow from above.

The flames erupted over the battlefield.

With a motion like that of a snake, it encircled the gargoyles which were about to attack Saito and turned them into cinders.

Saito and Tabitha were taken aback, and looked up to the sky.

“Why?”

“Ally...?”

Voices could be heard.

“'Not even a tenth of them' you say?”

From the skies, that voice reverberated.

It strangely echoed as if it were transmitted through loudspeakers.

Nevertheless, that voice sounded familiar.

In the laboratory, in the classrooms, in the courtyard... a voice he had heard many times before.

“Teacher?” Saito murmured.

He shook his head after that. It must be a hallucination. Teacher was suppose to be dead.

He was hearing voices that weren't there because he was too stressed out.

The gargoyles' assault continued. Sylphid began to dodge the attacks frantically again. Because of this, Tabitha and Saito could only cling onto it with all their might. They could not counterattack at all.

“You are not me. That's nothing to be ashamed about.”

That voice could be heard again.

Saito lifted his face and yelled,

“Teacher!!”

It was Colbert's voice. There's no mistake about it.

Surprise and delight swept through his heart.

Guonguonguon... The noise sounded through the sky.

Shushushushushushu... The sound became louder.

The colossal shadow descended slowly, and approached the group who were being attacked by gargoyles.

Saito's mouth was wide open.

W-What huge wings... so this was the object that was described as a *"bird-like monster"*.

Yeah.

Those were indeed wings. Huge wings which had a span of approximately 150 meters. Behind the wings, several huge propellers were spinning.

The flying object had wings in the shape of a flat isosceles triangle, and the huge propellers were its main driving force.

Quite different from the "mysterious bird", this was the real thing.

And when he saw those propellers... Saito's hopes were realised.

“You're alive...”

Then a sultry woman's voice that they hadn't heard in a while cried out.

“Hey guys, what are you doing? Having fun? Since when did you manage to make friends with gargoyles?”

Tabitha looked up at the owner of the voice.

“I was thinking of secretly arriving at the academy, and show off this *"Ostrant"* to surprise you all. But when we returned to Tristain, we made a navigation error and accidentally came here instead.”

“Kirche!”

Sure enough, that was the voice of Kirche who had not shown herself at the academy since taking Colbert's remains to Germania.

Next, Colbert's voice could be heard.

“Anyway... the 'Flying Serpents' are about to move, so be careful.”

“Do a nose-dive!” Saito yelled at Tabitha.

Tabitha nodded. Sylphid lowered her head, and swiftly dived down at once.

Baraaa... barabarararararaaaaa! Many shots were fired from launcher barrels located on the bottom of the *"Ostrant"*.

From behind the dropping cylinders, ignition fires were lit.

After that, *shupooooo!* The sound which he had heard while he was being pursued by the dragon knights in Albion before, echoed through the air.

Like fireworks in the night sky, Colbert's Flying Serpents ignited simultaneously.

The tips of the Flying Serpents were equipped with a magic device which transmitted "Detect Magic". That magic device reacted excitedly to the gargoyles, and the Flying Serpents quickly dashed towards them.

Generally, there were about two or three 'Flying Serpents' pursuing each gargoyle.

The Flying Serpents exploded at point blank range of the gargoyles, shattering into shards which ripped the gargoyles apart.

The gargoyles could not even think about escaping. One by one, they dropped to the ground.

One of the serpents reacted to Tabitha's magic, and flew towards her.

Saito jumped from the top of Sylphid, and slashed it before it could reach her.

Before he knew it, he could no longer feel even the pain at the side of his stomach.

The teacher is alive.

The person who believed in me...

The person who helped me so many times before...

And now... he is saving me yet again.

That fact gave Saito courage.

“I'm not alone.”

The runes on his left hand shone.

Using the explosion just now, grasping Derflinger with his left hand, Saito caught one of the Flying Serpents in the air.

Clinging onto the thing, which had a length about the same as Saito's height, he forcibly turned the head of the Flying Serpent to fly towards the gargoyle which was holding Louise. The magic device which had "Detect Magic" on it, sensed that gargoyle, and rushed swiftly towards it.

On top of the Flying Serpent, Saito adopted a stance as if crouching on top of a surfboard.

He approached the gargoyle in a furious speed.

He timed it properly.

Precisely a second before the collision, Saito leaped from the top of the Serpent, and sliced through the arm which had seized Louise. Just like that, he caught Louise in the sky.

Almost simultaneously, the Serpent that was behind them exploded, and the gargoyle whose arm was sliced through was blasted into smithereens.

They were lifted up by the blast... but Saito did not part with Louise.

Fragments shot into his body, sending intense pain to him.

In spite of that, Saito still did not let go.

They were blown upward by the explosion until they reached the apex, and then dropped due to gravity.

There were traces of tears in Louise's eyes.

Upon noticing that, Saito felt as if his heart was going to be crushed. In that moment, as if the gargoyle's hypnosis magic suddenly ran out, Louise's eyes suddenly opened.

“Yo, Louise...”

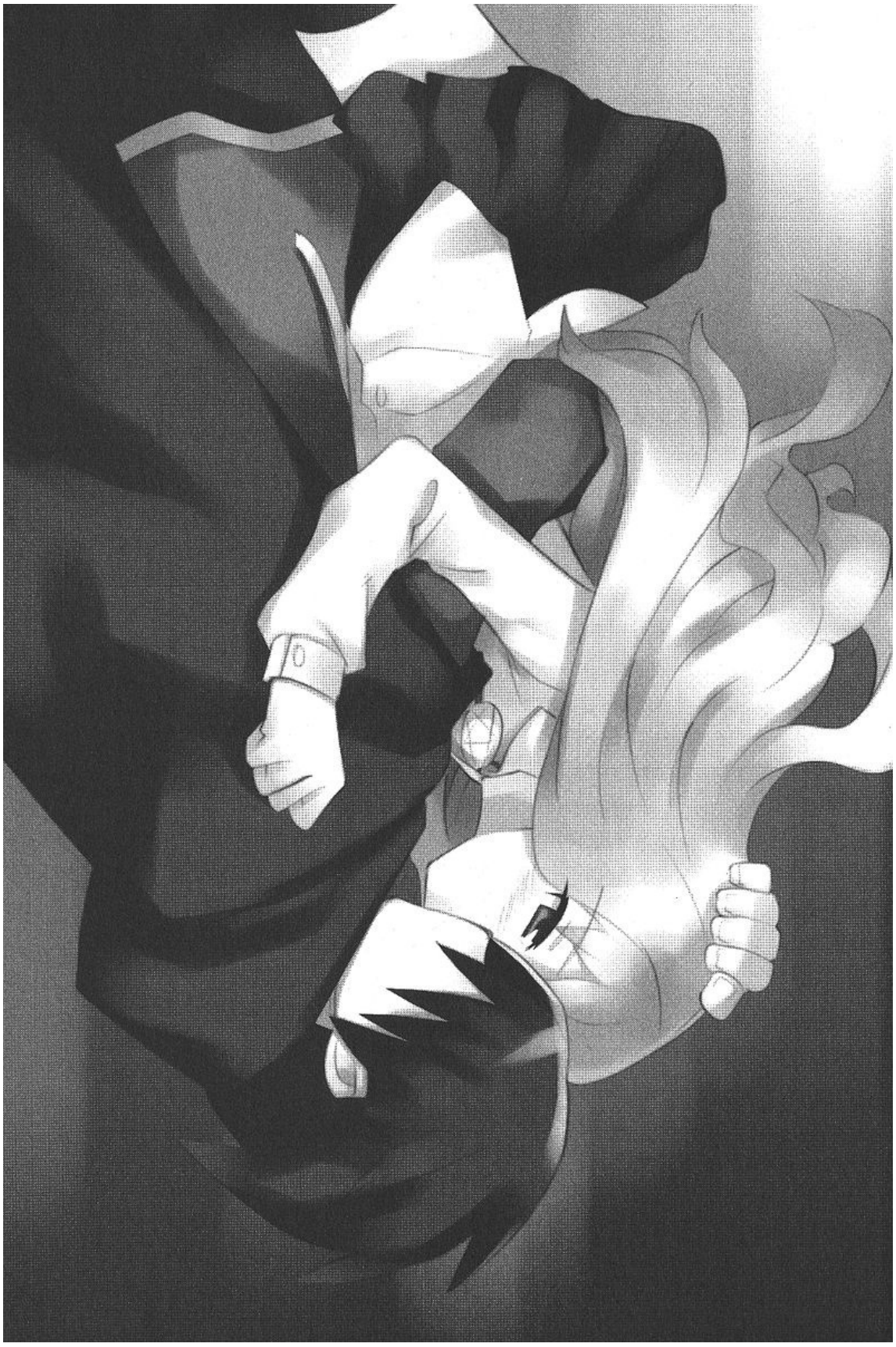
Saito said, and...

“Release me!”

Louise began to struggle.

“I-idiot! We're falling down right now! Stop struggling!”

“I don't care! That's enough, let go of me! I hate you Saito!! Just die! I hate you and Princess the most!! Both of you lied to me together! Absolutely unforgivable!!”



“That's just the way it turned out. Really, i-i-its like a misunderstanding...”

Even though Saito tried frantically to sooth her, Louise was still bawling and struggling with her hands. Perhaps she would be accidentally released like this. It would be terrible if they were to separate in the air.

I have to calm her down somehow. Saito thought.

“I hate you! Let me go! I've had enough!”

Looking at the bawling Louise... Saito knew that he could not make her understand with words.

What should I do...?

He was troubled. But then Saito looked straight at Louise, and said.

“I love you, Louise. Only you!”

“Liar! I don't believe you! I HATE you!”

Louise grew more and more upset.

There is no other way. Damn, if things keep continuing like this...

Saito hugged the raging Louise tightly. Louise was kicking and struggling, nevertheless he pressed his lips hard against hers.

Louise struggled for a while, but eventually and with a muffled "*ngu*...", she stopped resisting and became quiet.

But if we continue dropping like this we'll still die...

While he was thinking that, *"Buon!"* A sound was heard, and Tabitha's Sylphid scooped them up with its wings.

Relieved and hugging the still weeping Louise, Saito looked up to the sky...

Under the moonlight, flying regally in the sky, the *Ostrant* on which Colbert and Kirche were riding could be seen.

Epilogue

The next morning...

Gathering around, students and teachers from the Academy of Magic surrounded and stared at the *Ostland*, which was parked on a grassy field a distance away from the Academy of Magic.

At first glance, it was just like a gigantic ship.

The length of its wing span was roughly 150 mails. Although the hull of the ship was the same as the ones in Halkeginia, the huge propellers which were installed on its back, together with its huge wings, caused the ship to emanate a bizarre atmosphere. The propellers were installed one-by-one beside the extending wings.

“There are 3 spinning wings that provide the huge amount of horsepower needed to power this ship. The power which causes the revolving wings to operate... is acquired from the pressure of the steam which originates from water heated by coals. I call this a 'steam engine.' This is a design which resembled the installed power devices from that 'Dragon's Raiment,'”

Colbert explained to Mr. Osman who was standing beside him.

“What an awesome ship... Why did you install such huge wings?”

“To travel to the east. To work hard to travel long distances... we must by all means minimize the expenditure of wind stones. With those huge wings, the ship can get the buoyancy it needs to float, gliding and flying at the same time. Its principles are the same as the albatross and the oscar.

Mr. Osman rubbed his white beard.

“Well, this is splendid. If this is applied to warships, what type of air force would be able to form...?”

“I do not have any intention to use this as a warship. In the end, this is still an 'exploring ship.' Weapons needed to defend itself have been installed... but I have no intention to hand it over to the king's army. The expenses to construct this ship has been paid for by Miss Zerbst's family. So regardless, the ship belongs to Germania. If the Tristainian government inspects this ship, it would become a diplomatic issue. Well... in any case... besides me, no one else can fly this ship.”

Mr. Osman nodded, satisfied.

“If that's the case, I have nothing else to say. Believe in yourself, just like that, and decide your own path, Flame Serpent.”

Colbert smiled, and nodded.

At a place far away from that conversation, students were there watching attentively.

Kirche, Guiche, Montmorency, and Saito.

Montmorency muttered in a dispirited voice.

“That teacher is still alive huh... or should I say, why did you lie and say that he had died?”

Kirche combed her hair upwards triumphantly and replied.

“That's because... I had to lie to that scary Onee-san from the Musketeer Corps, right? At that rate, my Jean would be killed.”

“What do you mean by 'my Jean'?”

“Hey, isn't that his name?”

Apparently embarrassed, Kirche wriggled her body and murmured.

“Haaa? His name?”

“Yeah. What a lovely name...”

Absentmindedly, Kirche replied.

Montmorency who had realized Kirche's feelings from her look, asked in a amazed tone.

“You... don't tell me...”

“Yeah, that is it. But my Jean, he's so powerful, yet never shows off his powers, a knowledgeable person, and able to make such a magnificent thing like this ship!”

The expenses for the construction of the ship were apparently forked out by Kirche, or Kirche's family. The Zerbst of family of Kirche was wealthy and famous, but that's not the way to use it... *How dreadful it is for someone who fell completely in love!* Montmorency thought.

“What is your age gap?”

“For me, an age gap is not an obstacle at all.”

“What about his bald head?”

“Just like the sun. The symbol of passion.”

At that moment, Colbert called out to Kirche.

“Miss Zerbst.”

“Yeeeessss! Just call me Kirche! I've already told you many times! No way, my Jean!”

As if she skipped and tread, Kirche leaped to his side energetically. She clung onto him, and Colbert grimaced, looking troubled.

Montmorency muttered.

“Sigh... Things which must at a certain time happen will happen, huh?"

Guiche extended his arm towards Montmorency's shoulder.

“I don't really get it... but let us let things which must happen at a certain time to happen... with love."

Montmorency pinched the back of Guiche's hand and raised her eyebrows.

“It hurts!”

“You, while Saito and the others were in danger, what were you doing?”

“Ummm, in the ball...”

“And you formed the knight corps! You, get down to work! You're the Commanding Officer, right!?”

“Gyagya!” Guiche yelled, and dropped his shoulders, dejected.

At that same moment... Louise was in her room, confronting Henrietta.

Henrietta was investigating about the ones who had attacked Louise.

But she did not understand the details.

What she had confirmed was something like their opponent was Myoznitnirn, the opponent of the "familiar of Zero."

She planned to call Saito later to listen to the whole incident again.

“Because of my rash actions... I exposed you to danger again... My apologies.”

“No... It was not really Princess's fault...”

Louise replied in an unpleasant-like voice.

Both of them exchanged glances, and fell silent.

Louise tried to ask Henrietta about the things which filled her head.

Yet... those words could not come out.

To ask Henrietta about those things... meant that her relationship with Henrietta would crack.

Louise was troubled.

Should she ask or not?

No... the answer was already out.

Though their friendship since a young age would be broken apart, she had to ascertain it.

What she lacked was the courage to take the first step out.

“Princess, there's something I want to ask.”

“Wh-What is it?”

“Princess's actions in the ball, were they from your true feelings?”

Henrietta shook her head in a sad-looking face.

“Supposing those were my true feelings... what would you do?”

Louise who was distressed for a moment...

“I don't know.”

...said honestly.

Henrietta became anxious. She looked far into the distance, and bit her fingernails for a moment.

Louise realized that Henrietta's manner was as if she did not consider her state at all.

Evidently, this princess... was as if she did not realize Louise's feelings at all.

In contrast to friends or any other people, she did not appear to be any one of

them.

Instead of being angry, Louise was shocked.

It could not be helped that she was a true princess. For her to conjecture things like other people's feelings, she could not do it at all. So it was inevitable for Louise to get mad at her.

I was like that during those days as well, huh?

“What's wrong? What's so funny? Louise. I haven't said anything funny...”

Henrietta looked nervous.

While smiling bitterly, Louise said,

“No... Princess is only innocent. Sometimes, it looks like there are situations when the people around you could not agree with your innocence, no matter what.”

“I see...”

Depressed, Henrietta dropped her shoulders.

Henrietta was after all, still a human.

The same as herself; even Henrietta got troubled by trivial things... became weak and helpless, her feelings hurt due to petty matters... fell in love... She was just a normal girl like that.

Until then, Louise kept regarding the things Henrietta did as absolute. Since the start, she believed that they were correct. However, that was not the case. Henrietta made mistakes as well. She fell in love. And sometimes.....Henrietta may also try to fight for the person she likes, even if the person was Louise's lover.

She thought that... and somehow felt that this was like the first time she could understand Henrietta.

“That's okay. Princess' feelings are Princess' feelings. Please guard that valuable

thing gently. To take it out, or to leave it locked all the time, this is Princess' freedom. I do not find any fault with it.”

“I don't get it. I... what is that? Really, what do you mean...?”

Henrietta who was perplexed like that, appeared to be just like a childish kid.

Louise bowed at Henrietta once.

“Louise?”

“Please forgive me for my discourtesy.”

With a serious look, Louise slapped the left cheek of Henrietta who was taken aback.

Paaaaannnggg! The dry sound echoed in the room.

“Y-, you...”

Next, just like before, she landed another slap on the dumbstruck Henrietta's right cheek.

Paaaaaaaannnggg!

In that instant, Henrietta could not understand what happened... She just stared fixedly at Louise. Since she was born, she never had any experience with things like being slapped by someone else.

Louise knelt at Henrietta's feet.

“I have been very rude. However, that is my familiar. Since you were prepared to strike, please come with suitable readiness as well.”

Louise looked up at Henrietta. Anger and possessiveness were swimming in those eyes.

“Please be aware of that. Next time, if I use my flat hand again, I beg your pardon.”

In a daze, Henrietta stroked her cheek... after which she displayed a smile slowly.

She squatted, and hugged Louise's shoulders.

“Yes. To a mage, a familiar is the most valuable existence; just like the two moons in the night sky, a relationship which can not be severed. I will be aware of it. When I meet you, I will approach you with suitable readiness.”

The other royal lass was...

...in her own room, with a letter spread out in front.

A brand new letter without any signature or stamp.

Nevertheless, she understood the sender's intent, painfully.

The gist was simply... the deprivation of her "Chevalier" title, and the arrest of her confined mother at the shore of Ragdorian Lake. A short, two-line letter.

After finishing reading the letter, Tabitha tore it up into shreds... and let the pieces fly out the window.

Gazing at the paper shreds which scattered like snowflakes, Tabitha thought to herself.

I do not regret my conduct.

Anyhow, my mother is already an imprisoned body.

Her residence has merely changed.

I will retrieve my mum with my own hands.

That day is not far.

No, I have no plans to make it far.

After the scattered letter shreds had been blown by the wind till they disappeared... Tabitha faced the window, and whistled.

From the sky, Sylphid descended.

Jumping onto its back, Tabitha muttered a short sentence.

“To Gallia.”

After Mr. Osman joined Kirche and explained something, Colbert turned towards Saito for the first time.

Saito became very nervous.

Meeting Colbert whom he had thought all this time to be dead... what was the best thing to say first?

There were many things to say.

The war at Albion.

Many people had died.

The air battle between the dragon knights.

The occupation of the city of Saxe-Gotha.

And the escape.

His standing at the rear, stopping the army of 70,000.

Because of his achievements, his conferment of the title "Chevalier"...

However, he could not say anything when he saw Mr Colbert walk towards him. Saito could only press his lips together tightly, resisting the urge to cry as tears began to well up in his eyes.

He did not spend that long a time with Colbert.

But the value of a human is not decided through the length of time spent together.

Saito gazed at the middle-aged man of this world who appreciated him.

Someone who understood him significantly better than Louise.

In a familiar voice as if he met him in the academy, courtyard, or laboratory, Colbert spoke,

“Yo! Saito-kun. Long time no see, huh? During my absence, looks like you had gone through troubles and hardships.”

Saito hesitated, not knowing what to say.

He wanted to say something complicated, to show that he had grown.

Yet, those words could not come out.

Mixed with tears, a sad voice came out.

“Teacher... I... I kept thinking that you were dead...”

“My death, huh? No, my probable death, huh? I was going to ask you for a request. To show me your world.”

The tears which Saito had been fighting back overflowed.

“Why are you crying? What a worrisome pupil you are! Come now, shouldn't we go together? To the *Ostland*!”

Colbert clapped Saito's shoulder.

Saito was shedding tears of joy.

While he was shedding tears of joy... a question arose.

What is the true motive of the Myoznitnirn who had appeared again?

Henrietta said that she would look into it, but... I can't wait any longer. I will find out her true motive somehow, and ensure she will not be able to meddle with my affairs anymore. If I can't work out a plan...

And it seemed like Tabitha and that Myoznitnirn had some sort of connection.

There were many things he was worrying right now. *Where is Tabitha now?*

I will speak to her afterwards... but her figure could not be seen.

Passing through the Academy's gate, Louise went outside... and in front of her, an amazing scene was spread out.

The ship which possessed those huge wings, was parked on a grassy field.

The mast was of Germania... and the flag of the Von Zerbst family was fluttering. Apparently, they were saved by the ship of the Von Zerbst family of Germania.

Surrounding it were students and teachers who were admiring that ship and laughing.

Amongst them, she discovered Saito's figure... and Louise rushed over.

She must continue the incident from yesterday night.

At that time, she had planned to hit him many more times... but she could not do it.

“No way,”

Louise muttered.

Somehow that IDIOT began to stand out... and because of that, gathering attention to himself. Anyhow, he had even fascinated Henrietta...

How many times should I be fretting over him?

Leaving that aside, there was something else she was dissatisfied about.

After this, I'll get irritated many more times, right?

I would also get upset many times in my anger as well, right?

But still, whenever that happened...

“How could I be deluded with a kiss?”

That was her dissatisfaction.

Somehow, with only a kiss... with only a gentle embrace, nngh... *that 'me' who would just think that 'Never mind, it's okay.' is unforgivable...*

As she grew increasingly impatient, an angry-looking appearance surfaced, and Louise sped down the path towards that grassy field.

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ The Japanese character (kanji) for river is kawa . It looks like 3 (approximately) straight lines being put together. The author is implying that the three of them slept parallel together, just like that character.
2. ↑ The Japanese word for this is seihin which means 'living in poverty for the sake of one's pure conduct, not for one's self-interest.'